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THE
THIRD
WEAVER

EMILY CALVIN BLAKE

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*To the
Memory
of a Walk
in the Rain*

THE
THIRD
WEAVER

INFLUENCE

A QUAIN little figure in her Dolly Varden dress, Thaisa was often to be found in the drawing room of the old home in Manchester, gazing up at the immense tapestry that hung on the south wall facing the fireplace.

There were many figures in the tapestry — men and women on their way somewhere — but the dominant figure, a youth, head uplifted, and dancing, his hands outstretched, filled her with a half-frightened joy.

He seemed to be offering a gift. But what gift? This she had to imagine, and it was a different gift at different times — clusters of purple grapes, or roses, or simply love.

What troubled her, as she grew older, was that these figures apparently were bound all for the same journey's end, yet they seemed strangers to one another. Always she hoped that some day they would join hands and go forward dancing, like the somewhat aloof figure of the youth.

Standing before the tapestry, she would wait for this consummation. At high noon, when the sun came in through the long windows, the colors in the tapestry would come forth softly and her keen beauty-sense was satisfied, but still the figures remained unattached.

Then at twilight, when she was tired and perhaps confused by the strange things she had learned of grown people, she would come to a different interpretation of the figures in the tapestry.

The youth was set apart and happier than the others because he didn't care. That was the only way she could put it, but her solution meant a great deal to her because *she* cared so deeply — about being loved — about beauty — about everybody being 'even,' which meant equality to her.

And at twilight was a sadness too, because she felt that the figures would never join hands until they knew something the youth knew. And it wouldn't be much worth while — his just telling. She sensed that. One had to learn.

Sometimes in the dusk, Grandmother sat in the room. Thaisa, turning from the tapestry, would go to lean against the thin old shoulder. 'Is it because he doesn't care, that he is happy?' she would ask. There was ice in Grandmother's spirit, but she understood Thaisa's perplexities. 'There are different ways of not caring,' she would answer, and break off. And Thaisa would wait in vain for her to go on.

Of the tapestry itself, Grandmother told her that a worker took strands and wove or embroidered, a bit here, a bit there, till the picture came out.

Thaisa thought such a worker must be very wonderful.

But Grandmother said no, just a man, an ordinary weaver. And not so important the weaver as the pattern he made.

PART ONE

I

THAISA'S pattern began in the English life when she lived with her grandparents and Richard, her father, in the old Victoria Park home. In those days her poke bonnet framed a face chiefly distinguished for its look of sensitive curiosity. Her skin was pale with clear rose tints; her grey eyes a surprise against that tender color. The copper tinted hair falling straight below her shoulders had an alive quality that brought out, even in shadow, unexpected gleams.

She was very happy. Most of the time, she danced about the halls of this ancestral home, or played in the beautifully kept grounds. Afterwards she would walk through the glass conservatory in which a hundred golden canaries sang. This place belonged to Richard. There had been a stable with fine horses once, but now it stood empty, the horses sold, the old coachman gone.

One summer her cousin Bobby came from America to visit his grandparents. Bobby's father and Thaisa's were brothers. Bobby, it seemed to Thaisa, held strange viewpoints. He told her that his father was a great man who worked in a coffee house of which he was manager. Thaisa had confided that her father too was great, at which absurdity Bobby stared.

'What does he do?' he inquired. 'In New York a man has to work.'

'He makes you happy.'

Thaisa's ideality struck him as ridiculous, and he disdained to answer. But his attitude did not in the slightest degree touch Thaisa's worship for her father. She thought of him as big and strong, with a swift wind in him that took away her breath. When she was tired he would hold her and sing in a deep baritone voice that made strange thrills play up and down her spine; or he would draw music from the organ on the balcony that jutted out over the big center hall.

'I suppose your mother's a great woman too!' Bobby remarked. Now in reality Thaisa knew little of her mother, Jenny Worthington. Just flashes of an exuberant personality that came and went in the old home—a gay figure, suddenly appearing, wearing garish colors, and with quantities of black hair done in a waterfall under an impudent little hat.

It was evident, of course, that Jenny belonged to Richard—that gay, imperturbable father who, though very affable at first, shortly after her arrival would leave on some trip or other. Then would Jenny rave and flaunt, and after awhile she herself would depart.

So, knowing so little and with her heart uninvolved, Thaisa could not say that her mother was a great woman. A picturesque one, yes—a whirlwind and one who disturbed, but that was all.

So she remained silent, and Bobby laughed in triumph: 'You don't know what greatness is, Thaisa.'

Perhaps she didn't. She knew what love was, and of that she gave prodigally. Bobby said, 'Come on upstairs and play battledore and shuttlecock.'

And so they played that exciting game till dinner was served. At eight, Bobby, who was studying with a tutor, sought his own room to prepare his lessons, while Thaisa followed Grandmother into the drawing room.

The evening was chilly after a day of fog and rain and a log burned in the fireplace. Beside the great tapestry hung portraits of old men with high collars, flanked by pictures of silken-clad old ladies—men and women, who looked as though they had never been disturbed by the call of desire or sin. Pieces of faded damasks, carved woods pearl-inlaid, crystal chandeliers, a tall rosewood chair with a Swiss music box hidden beneath its seat made a room of soft lights and shadows, all entuned by time into one finished richness.

Grandmother went to sit in a high, narrow chair that faced the fire while Thaisa seated herself on a stool beside her. Grandfather, nearby, glanced up from his book and cast a look of longing at Grandmother—Grandmother who, isolate and proud, did not notice.

Grandmother, ice-bound, sitting there—never a look at the man who seemed so lonely. A continuing silence, till: ‘Thaisa, shall we read a while?’

‘If you please, Grandmother.’ With her acute ear she caught even beneath such trite words, the lilt of pain that must always dwell with this remote, cold creature. How dreadful to be like that! Would she too perhaps—in that fair land to which apparently she was traveling, the land of Grown People—be shut away from warmth and beauty? . . .

She shivered in apprehension, and Grandmother caught her to her, held her and at that moment Richard came in,

aglow as always. Thaisa ran to him — was lifted high. Afterwards, as Grandmother left the room, she stayed in his arms as he sat in the rosewood chair that tinkled music. Outside it was raining again. Thaisa could hear the soft beat of the drops against the window panes. But the crimson curtains were drawn, and here in Richard's arms, beside the fire, with the soft voices going on, she felt secure, at peace.

She thought of Richard's soul — that part of one so mysterious. Where was it? Did it hang pendulum-like in his body, against which with such joy she leaned?

Suppose it were like a purple balloon that could be inflated, deflated. In the kitchen she had watched Maggie put barm into flour to make the bread rise. Something like the barm was the breath. How far away Richard's voice sounded, but how beautiful he was. How she loved him! A different love from that which she gave Grandmother or Grandfather, or this mother, Jennie Worthington, whom she so seldom saw. How many, many kinds of love there were in the world. She loved Father more, Oh, much more than she loved God. Well, why not? God was a giant cut off at the waist and sitting on a marble slab, passing judgments. . . . One could not love such a figure — so distant, so majestic.

The voices went on.

'Have you seen Jenny lately, Richard?' Grandfather asked.

'A few days ago. She'll come back, if we promise to show no more airs.'

'We're the aggressors then?'

'She claims so.'

‘Your wife has temperament, I take it.’

‘I’m not the domestic, stay-put sort, I suppose, that Jenny would like. Undoubtedly I asked too much of her in expecting her to adapt herself to a new kind of life.’

‘No use regretting the past now, Richard, my son. You’re both young. You can always start afresh.’

‘Seemingly in all the trials I fail; something happens to set Jenny off.’

He hesitated. ‘. . . Father, I’ve thought of America — some day — new scenes — new viewpoints.’

‘I’d be sorry to see you go, my son. . . .’

Grandmother entered again. Immediately Grandfather rose; Father more slowly. ‘Richard,’ said Grandmother, ‘Thaisa should have been in bed an hour ago.’

‘I’m sorry. But she was so quiet — like a little mouse.’

Thaisa went to Grandmother, took her extended hand. As she neared Grandfather she paused, but he did not see her. His eyes were fixed on Grandmother with a strange bitterness. Was he going to cry? ‘Oh, Grandfather,’ Thaisa cried and ran to kiss him. But her kiss did not heal — that she saw.

2

In a casual manner, Jenny Worthington came on one of her ‘visits.’ Grandmother, with some injunctions, sent Thaisa into the library, and there was Jenny seated near the long east window. She looked very sweet, clad in a plain grey cashmere dress, with her black hair drawn smoothly back and caught in the nape of her neck. Her eyes were

calm, but in some deep part Thaisa knew the possibility of a quick-springing mood that would make those same eyes blaze.

Jenny turned, exclaimed: 'Thaisa! Eh, but tha've grown!'

Thaisa advanced, curtesyed. 'I am glad to see you, Mother,' she said, stumbling over the unaccustomed word, but remembering Grandmother's admonitions. 'Shall we have the pleasure of a long stay this time?'

Jenny stared, did not answer, and Bobby ran in, announcing that a letter had come, calling him back home to America.

'Where I wish I were goin',' said Jenny quickly and gave a quick, distasteful look about her. Here she must curb everything — accent, rich color, life itself.

'Don't you like it here, Mother?' Thaisa asked as Bobby went away. 'Is that why you don't come often?'

'Like it! Well, what matters? Old Worthington gambling. . . . This narrow gathering'll have a wide scatterin', let me tell you.'

Thaisa was puzzled. 'I love it here.'

'Yes, you would. You belong, by the way you look — and you my own child.'

Thaisa felt the sudden resentment. She stood, not knowing what to say. Then all at once, through the velvet hangings came Richard, debonair, smiling, wholly unembarrassed, it seemed; and immediately Jenny had quite forgotten her daughter. And there had been tenseness in the room — incomprehensible forces that reached out and frightened.

But Richard was very courteous to his wife. They sat together at the table in the dining room, with its dark woods and deep velvet carpet; and the children, Thaisa and Bobby, gazed curiously and said little, because all the elders were so quiet.

Afterwards, in a flash of good humor, and with one of the impulses that led him, Richard suggested a holiday jaunt for Jenny, Thaisa and himself.

Jenny, somewhat subdued after the silent meal, was at once gay and happy.

‘Tomorrow?’ she asked, like a child.

‘Tomorrow,’ Richard agreed.

‘New Brighton?’

But not New Brighton for Richard. Still, when he saw Jenny’s disappointment, he consented.

Thaisa always remembered this holiday, because in New Brighton, after they had finished their crumpets at an inn, they started to walk down the street, Jenny’s hand nestling in the crook of Richard’s arm. Jenny looked at Richard worshipfully, and something latent, of swift piercing quality, stirred in the child.

And then they met some one who spoiled the day—a large man, with a small woman hanging to his arm. This man Jenny tried to avoid. But he was not easily to be put aside. He turned to Thaisa, and cried, ‘Hey there, Thaisa, dost remember thy Grandfeyther Evans?’

Just as Thaisa started to smile courteously, Richard pulled her forward. But Grandfeyther Evans, nothing daunted, pushed on also. ‘Na then, Son-in-law Worthington,’ he

cried, 'tha munna be so unpolite. This buxom lass be my bride; shake 'ands.'

No one answered.

'Jenny, my girl,' Grandfeyther Evans continued, 'tha'rt standing there frettin' the skin off thy teeth because of this meetin'. Be tha ashamed of thy own feyther?'

'Not of my feyther,' returned Jenny, the pink coming up to her eyes, 'but I'm ashamed of the way thee carries on about tha frequent marriages.'

'Come along,' said Richard. He was very angry — that could be seen. The bride let fall a small package and stooped to recover it. With an adroit movement, Grandfeyther Evans tumbled her over. Quickly she turned upon him, fury lighting her eyes. Her mouth moved, but only a sibilant whisper came from between her lips.

'What's tha sayin'? I don't get thee!' he repeated, cupping his ear and doubling up with laughter at her futile rage.

'There now, Son-in-law Worthington, dost know a cleverer trick than that?' he asked. 'After three talkative women, to wed one that can't speak above a whisper — a woman with as quick a temper as tha please, an' who can't make 'erself 'eard! Canst imagine the joy to be got out o' such a situation?'

'I can imagine nothing coarser than your behavior,' Richard returned in an icy voice. 'Come along,' he commanded his own.

'Yes, go thee along, Little Princess,' Grandfeyther Evans urged, the tears of mirth suddenly drying in his eyes, 'and learn from thy feyther's people to be a worthless snob.'

Thaisa stood perfectly still. 'But remember, my pretty

wench,' he continued, 'thy mither's mither sold kerchiefs off Nottingham Mill Stones when I took up with her; so ne'er let thy pride run away with thee.'

Richard hurried her forward. But they could not, it seemed, elude that ringing voice. 'And remember tha this, too. If thy feyther's people thought it a disgrace to have my daughter wed into their fambly, I thought it no less a disgrace to take the ne'er-do-weel into mine.'

After that the day was spoiled irrevocably. 'I knew something frightful would happen,' Richard commented, 'when we went to that impossible place.'

Jenny stood perfectly still. 'Na see tha here, Richard Worthington, keep tha airs to thasel'. When it comes down to it, tha'rt not so much.' Her accent, which she tried so hard to subdue, came out thickly.

Richard strode on, holding Thaisa's hand. But neither one could escape Jenny's voice. No matter how fast they walked, her voice reached them, going on and on. Thaisa felt drowned in words; they beat into her, shut down on her own forces. She felt she must scream — but instead she went on with the tide.

3

And Jenny kept right on talking. For days, it seemed to Thaisa, the flood poured. During this time the little girl learned a great deal. Nothing, it seemed, had ever pleased Jenny. She had been persuaded to give Thaisa up as a baby to this frozen grandmother. Thaisa, that outlandish name that Richard had chosen out of a man named Shakespeare.

She had come to the Victoria Park house for a while, but it was soft, cold smiles, and move your fork this way, and turn your head that way. And Richard — off on a trip every other week, when he should have stayed close by her side.

. . . And in a way that hurt Thaisa: ‘Thaisa, you remember your Grandfeyther Evans in New Brighton, t’other day?’

‘Yes, oh, yes.’

‘He said summat about ma mither — about my mother. Well, don’t remember that. It’s not worth your while. I’ll tell you. There was my brother, a brave, high-spirited lad who used to write bits of verse; he died after a bout in a public house, but given his chance he’d a been somebody; and his blood too is in your veins. . . .’

‘I’ll remember, Mother. . . .’

4

And then all at once Jenny was gone; and school commenced with Miss Murdock, that tall, thin lady, head of the private school for young gentlewomen. She seemed cold, though good, but one day she pressed Thaisa to her. It gave Thaisa a shock to feel the life of the body she touched. She had thought Miss Murdock a long, flexible rod beneath the plain silk dresses. But there was a heart beating in rhythm, and yielding softness.

Then in school holidays — a trip with Richard to Ireland. In Dublin they changed for a vehicle driven by a funny little Irishman who took them out to the farm lands. Summer — and in the fields peasants bobbed and smiled. Rich-

ard took off his hat. They came to a clear, wind-swept place where he seemed to belong as a part of the scenery. The breezes blew his hair so that he looked wild, like a wood creature. They were quite alone, and at once he threw back his head and began to sing some wild, lusty song.

She felt a deep kinship with him, so that she too wanted expression. One step she took, then another. The wind on her cheek whipped her to a high exhilaration and with head up, hands outstretched to the heavens, she danced with joyous freedom, gay laughter coming from between her parted lips.

‘Exquisite,’ said Richard as she came to pause beside him. ‘What are you trying to say, Thaisa?’

‘Oh, Father, I just want to give something, make a present to the world.’

He stared at her then. ‘. . . Is that it — is that it?’ he murmured. ‘Yes, that’s your *métier* — that will have to happen.’ And on a very serious note, for Richard: ‘We’ll have to leave you alone, quite alone, I can see that. . . .’

But he grew gay again, and began to talk to her in a way that made her know he wanted her to do something. ‘A mother,’ he said, ‘is a very precious thing, Thaisa — some one to be cherished all one’s life.’

That little voice saying that he was asking something of her. ‘. . . I always think of a picture that hangs in the famous Louvre Conservatory in France,’ he continued, ‘a woman holding her babe, that’s all, but such beauty in her expression, quite breath-taking.’

She knew at once what he meant. And he had the power to make you perform what he could only feel. She meant

to be very, very good to Jenny, her mother, when next she saw her. But she was not so happy now; some weight was upon her, dragging her down. She had felt so free and light there when she danced on the moors, and then the weight had fallen.

He knew something had damped her spirit. 'I'll tell you, Thaisa,' he began. 'It will be jolly to write some little plays and we'll act them out at home on the top floor; pantomimes too, we'll do behind a sheet.'

In an instant, joy flooded her. He knew how she liked to act. 'Oh, Father,' she cried, 'I love you so. . . .'

5

To keep Father's image shining and intact occupied her heart a great deal after that; for he never did get to writing the little play, as he had promised. She would not remind him, but she followed him about, waiting. After a time, she knew he had forgotten.

But soon there came dire news that put everything else aside. Grandmother told her that she was to go to live with Mother — for a time, anyway.

'Away from you, Grandmother?'

'Yes, Thaisa, but I shall come often to see you.'

No use crying. . . . So it came about that, one day, Grandmother dressed her in a pink cotton frock with forget-me-not sprigs, and a leghorn hat trimmed with a black velvet band. With a little bag at their feet, they were whirled away in a cab out through Alexander Park.

In Owen's Court the cab stopped. 'Here we are,' said

Grandmother. They faced a little house with green shutters — very smug it seemed — set back from the street.

Grandfeyther Evans answered the knock on the door. At once he was conciliatory to Grandmother. Thaisa felt that he was awed by her lace bonnet and silk-fringed dolman. He led the way into the parlor, murmuring that Jenny would be in presently, since she had stayed at home that day from work.

Thaisa stood, looking about. There was a dented piano whose yellow keys were like slabs of custard pie; green plush chairs with black and white antimacassars on their backs; two what-nots crowded with shells marked 'Blackpool,' 'New Brighton,' 'Hardwick Green'; a carpet that confused by its brilliant colors; and one outstanding picture — among many others — of Christ ascending on clouds into heaven.

Grandfeyther Evans evidently followed his usual procedure regarding this picture, for it seemed as though he were repeating a formula:

'My first wife, Jenny's mother, were a Catholic, ma'am, an' I leave the picture hung in deference to 'er memory. I hope tha don't mind, seeing tha'rt a Protestant.'

Thaisa felt Grandmother quiver as they stood close. She herself did not like this blarneying Grandfeyther Evans; infinitely she preferred the one of New Brighton, with blustering mien and picturesque phrases. Now, he was like a field mouse.

'If I might see your daughter?' Grandmother murmured.

Grandfeyther disappeared, and in a moment Jenny entered alone.

Jenny seemed to fit in better in this blatant room than in Grandmother's richly subdued environment. She wore a dress with a little bustle, and her hair came down in a straight bang, close to her eyes. She stood straight and far away, offering no word. So Grandmother said, 'As we agreed, I've brought the child to you.'

'Why didn't Richard come himself?'

'He thought you and Thaisa might begin better if he were out of it. Later he will come, if he can.'

Jenny put out a hand and drew Thaisa to her, but her triumphant gaze fell before Grandmother's level eyes. It was as though she had nothing with which to meet some exquisite quality in the other; all her tools were too blunt.

'I would advise Thaisa's return next September to Miss Murdock's very excellent school, where the child is doing well; then there are her music and languages. Of course, you can discuss these matters with Richard.'

'Oh, aye,' said Jenny sharply.

'And then there's her reading to be directed. I'll send you a list of things.'

Jenny barely nodded now, but when Grandmother had gone, after Thaisa's despairing clinging, Jenny began at once: 'Private schools and what-not! An' that old pillar of ice! Do you know what I were doing at nine? . . . Well, I were workin' in a shirt factory; Father were always in his cups in those days, and Mother had to have help. Yes, I were turnin' up hems on shirts. The foreman used to lift me up in the mornin' on to the long table and I'd turn hems until noon, and then he'd lift me down to eat; an' then up again for the afternoon.'

‘. . . Well, come along; I don’t expect you to understand; supper’s about ready.’

Thaisa was not hungry; her heart ached and yearned for the known things. Grandfeyther Evans pressed sausage rolls with rich pork gravy upon her. ‘. . . They’ll make hair grow on thy chest, Thaisy,’ he told her.

Jenny intervened: ‘Tha should see the dainties she gets at the Worthingtons!’ Rising, she went into the scullery, and returned with a glass of milk and a plate of jam sandwiches.

Afterwards Grandfeyther Evans tried to amuse her by making a little engine of his own invention puff round and round on the parlor floor. He spoke of guineas; he would make many if he could sell something he had patented on his engine.

‘Father has many guineas,’ Thaisa told him. ‘He collects them from the tenants in Ireland and Wales.’

‘Aye, but he gets them for naught he hisself ha’ done, so he gives liberally; easy enough to gi’ away money when thee ’aven’t sweat for it. Mind thee this, my proud wench, the Lord ne’er meant for one man to work in muck and t’other to put his yand out for guineas, and naught in return.’

‘I wish everybody could be even.’

‘And there tha’rt fine and right, and I’m surprised a Worthington should come to that view. Well, some day we’ll take from them that ha’ too much and give to them that ha’ too little.’

‘But I wouldn’t feel happy just because I had as much money as you have.’

‘Because thee knows naught o’ the use of money; but re-

member this all thy days: Thy feyther's not one bit better than thy Grandfeyther Evans.'

'I think he must be; he makes people happy.'

'How then?'

'He makes me happy when he plays the organ and sings.'

'Little then does it take to make thee happy. An' what does thy fine feyther do in this world?'

'He recites beautiful poetry. And then he cares for a lot of little yellow birds in a glass house.'

'Eh, ma word! A bird fancier — good substantial work for a grown man! And come you were starvin', my gay lass, he couldna make a farthing.'

'But I like to hear my father's music, and when he stands on a moor in Ireland, with the wind ruffling his hair, I want to dance and fly.'

'Now tha go right on feelin' that way, but I hope tha'll always ha' a full belly. Trouble is, Thaisy, tha'll always put too much stress on what is pretty and what makes tha happy; and tha'll know many a hard knock before tha doesna give a farthin' what happens to thasel'. . . .' He paused. 'To know that life be all brass and tinsel.'

Jenny entered and packed him off to his night work in the glass factory. Then she took Thaisa upstairs to bed. When she undressed the child, she exclaimed over the small petticoats, exquisitely embroidered; murmured above the shining hair that Grandmother brushed so lovingly night and morning. 'They've spoiled tha for me, that's all,' she cried. And then: 'Whatever will I do with thee if tha doesna bring him here to me?'

6

Jenny worked days in the Lancaster Cotton Mills; Mary Ann, Grandfeyther's wife, was busy all day between the kitchen and the scullery. Books hadn't come from Grandmother. Long, lonely days.

But some days Jenny stayed home. And she sang. Once:

‘For she knows that o’er the Jasper sea,
They sail together, the father and he . . .
They sail together, the father and he . . .’

‘Mother, where is the Jasper sea?’

‘Eh, it’s a great sea flowin’ in heaven; sparklin’ ’tis and of rare colors, and it gives off a scent richer than all the flowers on earth.’

‘Oh, Mother, I’d like to sail on that Jasper sea.’

‘Well, tha’ll not, I’ll tell thee that!’ And suddenly Jenny’s arms were about Thaisa with a passion that hurt the child. ‘Ne’er thee say that wish again, note me?’

Then seeing that she had frightened her daughter, she asked, ‘What dost thy grandmother do to amuse thee betimes?’

‘She tells me stories; sometimes about when she was a Princess and she met the Prince at the Queen’s Ball.’

‘Princess, Princess, look sharp!’

‘Oh, not really a Princess. Just Grandmother when she met Grandfather at the ball. But it is beautiful.’ And she finished, ‘So they fell in love and were happy ever after.’

‘ Well, na then, that’s good. And were happy ever after, and not a word spoken by her to him since Richard were a small lad! Still in her own way, she got the upper hand; he’s where she wants him.’ Jenny paused in speculation. ‘ Well, that’s ’er way!’ She caught herself sharply with a quick glance at Thaisa. ‘ Now I’ll tell a tale of thy father and me, as romantic a tale as ever was. . . .’

‘ One night was I not dancin’ in a big hall in Billingslea Lane when the feather in my new hat caught flame from a gas jet? . . . I’d seen in the doorway a pair of young bucks going the round of the cheap places for their fun. Well, one of them — tall he were with dark eyes and curly hair — sprang forward and with his bare hands put out the fire.

‘ And there we stood with t’ sorry feather burned down to its stalk and starin’ at one another. Aye, yes, we were drawn. And so ’twas with Richard and me. And ’twas but a month before we were wed.’

‘ Oh, Mother, in shining white, like Grandmother, walking under crossed swords?’

‘ Swords, is it? I’ve had enough o’ those since. No, ’twas with a dozen others standing in a row, and Parson going down the line saying: “ Do you take this man? Do you? Do you? ” Eh, but it was wonderful too.’

Jenny ceased and sat staring before her. Her mind was working busily. Suddenly she began, words pouring out. ‘ Well, now I’m goin’ to take thee away — I’ll scare them good and plenty — to a little place near Blackpool. I’ll have them running about.’

Thaisa turned white. ‘ Oh, Mother, don’t take me away from where Grandmother lives. Don’t, Mother!’

Jenny turned swiftly on her with an avalanche of words that beat the child down. She could not move away, but stood there, just being pelted. She felt inert under this force and knew only that she would have to obey. 'I'll have him under my thumb,' Jenny went on. 'He is my 'usband all legal and right, and I'll hold him.' She put her hand on Thaisa's small shoulder. 'Tha should feel good to help tha mother,' she said. 'They set such store by thee; now let them ache because tha'll be gone.'

A little pawn; Thaisa felt helpless while the scalding tears filled her eyes.

7

But before Jenny could perfect her plans, a messenger came, giving word of Grandmother's illness, and Thaisa was returned to the old home.

Grandmother recovered and moved about, though very slowly, in her silken gowns with the rare lace at throat and sleeves. Grandfather too flitted in and out, dark and morose.

Richard went away to Scotland and Ireland. He returned, brown and handsome as a young god, with no cares or weights on his shoulders.

Grandmother, driven in a hired carriage, called for Thaisa one day at Miss Murdock's school. They went to Miss Jones's, the herbalist's, where they bought a package of marsh-mallow and raspberry leaves. Then from a cocoanut barrel, Miss Jones weighed out five snow ounces on the fascinating scales and added a few drops of rosemary and lavender oil — the unguent for Thaisa's hair.

Miss Jones said, 'The little girl is growing fast, and very like you, Mrs. Worthington.'

'Do you think so?' For some reason, whenever anyone made this observation, Grandmother looked very pleased.

From Miss Jones's they went to Mrs. Howe's shop, rooted in a dark, unfrequented street. In through a great, carved door they entered, and presently the interior with its many, many treasures came clear. And a sign done in black letters with crisp sparkle over them. The sign read:

Not only does Mrs. Howe lend money in a genteel way to those in immediate stress, but she keeps always on hand a collection of wondrous wares gathered from every clime.

Grandmother talked in low tones to Mrs. Howe, who came forward in her stiff, black alpaca dress. Then in a few moments they left, but as they sat in the carriage, Thaisa looked up and missed some beauty. 'Oh, Grandmother,' she cried, 'you've lost your brooch!'

But Grandmother was not startled, though the wondrous guinea-gold brooch with its dull topaz stone and soft pink pearls was not at her throat where always Thaisa had seen it.

After this, events broke swiftly, and one day, Thaisa saw the dismantling of the old home. Men and women came crowding about Chippendale tables, silken draperies, golden clocks. They clustered wonderingly about carved panels and glowing brasses, and one woman bent and touched the pearl-inlaid chair. Its hidden music box tinkled out a gay tune.

Some one lifted down the exquisite tapestry, and Thaisa cried out. She could not endure the sacrilege of seeing that courageous figure of the dancing youth pulled to the ground.

But the auctioneer asked for a bid on a piece of work far famed. And as he did so, Grandmother's head fell back. Richard lifted the slight figure and carried her from the room, Thaisa following after.

She sat on the stairs outside Grandmother's room, moving aside as the hurriedly summoned doctor passed her. She thought again of the tapestry downstairs and felt a stab. . . . All kinds of fancies filled her. . . .

Some noisy person downstairs would take the tapestry away from its place and in some manner distort its pattern. Somewhere, it would be hung where no light would shine upon it to bring out its rich colors, reveal its many intricate blocks and stitchings — unable so to reveal its meaning.

You took your strands and wove a bit here — a bit there — Grandmother's words. . . . She looked up. Richard was coming from the quiet room, and on his face lay tears.

PART TWO

I

EVERYTHING she loved had been left behind. Grandfather very quickly had followed Grandmother into her silence. On an October day Thaisa stood beside her father on the upper deck of a vessel that was headed toward America. She thought of England and what lay behind. Her eyes blurred.

But Richard was, as always, looking toward a new land. With a quick gesture he lifted her and held her against his breast. 'The golden gates are opening,' he cried. Such was his faith.

Richard talked ardently of America. 'But are the streets really paved with gold?' Thaisa asked, as they tramped the decks.

'No—I believe not.' But she got the impression that in his deepest heart he really believed they were paved with gold.

Jenny, on the contrary, had a morbid feeling that it had been a foolish procedure, after all, to tear up all roots and start anew. 'When thy father came to me and asked me to go to America with him, I couldna say him nay,' she said to Thaisa. 'But he has no trade, and we cannot live on naught.'

This economic question didn't disturb Thaisa as other questions disturbed her. Would America accept them? Would Aunt Sarah and Uncle Henry think her father sin-

ful as Bobby once had intimated, because he did not work?

‘It’ll be pretty well up to me to keep the pot boilin’,’ Jenny concluded.

‘But I can help, can’t I, Mother?’

‘Thy feyther’ll insist on a fine education for thee, seeing where’er tha’ll be, tha’rt still a Worthington,’ said Jenny keenly.

But there were times when Jenny was just as buoyantly hopeful as ever was Richard. ‘And we’ll be all together, not dragged apart,’ she confided one day. ‘There’ll be no quality to think I’m not fit to raise my own daughter.’

A flush mounted to Thaisa’s eyes. ‘Grandmother was beautiful; besides you gave me away in the beginning.’ And after a silence: ‘She told me often that I must love you; you are my mother, she said.’

‘Aye, that I be right enough; and in America I’ll trick thee out in gay ribbons and twist up thy hair.’

‘And we’ll be good friends, Mother?’ A yearning was within her, some ache that the thought of gay ribbons and twisted hair somehow did not satisfy.

‘Be a good lass and show none o’ tha airs, and we’ll be good enough friends, I’ll warrant.’

‘In America,’ Richard declared, ‘there’s Democracy.’

‘What’s that, Father?’

‘That everybody’s on an equality.’

‘Will people all be happy and beautiful if they’re equal?’

‘Democracy’s one of America’s strengths,’ he answered, going beyond her.

2

Richard held her high in his arms one bright day so she might see the Statue of Liberty, a great figure with the beckoning torch held in outstretched, welcoming hand.

‘Freedom!’ Richard murmured, and Jenny, standing near, was awed.

‘Dost yon statue mean a welcome to all?’ she asked.

‘To all,’ Richard responded. He seemed lifted out of himself.

And then — New York, and Uncle Henry’s home on Twenty-eighth Street. Bobby, Thaisa thought, was glad to see her, but he was reticent. Uncle Henry she liked at once. He was Richard’s brother, but he was not like Richard. Still there was a look in his tired eyes, at once kindly and sparkling, that seemed to struggle up through a mist.

Aunt Sarah gave the impression of a never-ceasing activity. Her thin, flat figure, clad in a starched gingham apron dress, moved in quick jerks; her eyes eternally roamed from one object to another, and nothing ever escaped her vigilant attention.

Upon their arrival at the immaculate flat, Aunt Sarah at once indicated a room to the left toward which Jenny and Thaisa moved automatically. This long, very thin drum major must be obeyed.

Jenny and Aunt Sarah from the first seemed natural enemies. Yet there were times when they met in the freemasonry of woman talk. Thaisa, as she sewed on a piece of unbleached muslin which Aunt Sarah had early produced

for 'learning on,' sometimes wondered what so many words were all about, and why suddenly the two seemed so friendly. When they talked of Grandmother, for instance. . . .

'I remember well,' from Aunt Sarah, 'before your time, Jenny, on one of my visits there, how she looked in her fine silks, with her proud face.'

'Proud she was.'

'Do you think she still cared for him?'

'Cared! I think she worshiped him in her own touch-me-not way,' Jenny returned sagaciously. 'She just lived on the long, deep looks he passed at her.'

'Tut, tut!' from Aunt Sarah, 'that's one way of holding on to your man. Still, there was that affair with the actress; she never forgave that.'

'Maybe it wasn't forgiveness; maybe she was all frost. Just wanted to stop being familiar with him.'

'Now Jenny!'

'What now! What now!'

The two women went on talking, while Thaisa set the tiny stitches in the horrid seam.

And Richard talked: 'I want first,' he said, 'to absorb the spirit of America, and then I can give my best services.' He looked as though he were flying, Thaisa thought worshipfully.

'The spirit of America is independence,' Aunt Sarah returned swiftly, 'to make money enough for self-respect.'

Richard went white. 'Then it's the soul of America I want to find.'

After a time he took out his first papers; he was well on the way to becoming a citizen of the United States. Thaisa

never knew whether he completed his citizenship. She had, by now, many problems of her own.

There was school where the children taunted her because of her clothes and her different way of speaking. She was very unhappy, and at this crisis she longed for her father.

She approached him one night, but he was sunk in some mood strange to him; America's coldness had hurt him more than any experience in his life. He looked at Thaisa, not seeing her, not realizing the acuteness of her desire for his tender understanding. She could not voice her deep needs, not only the need to receive, but the necessity for some one — this father most passionately — upon whom to pour her love. But he did not see her near him.

The emptiness, instead of lifting, grew. One morning in school when she was reciting, she sat down amidst a sound of laughter. She knew she was different, but the blood rushed to her face. Suddenly she felt the impossibility of remaining. She stood up in her place, stared about a moment, and ran out of the room. As she went, a consciousness came to her of the upturned, surprised eyes of the children, the arrested, indecisive expression on the teacher's face. But she did not pause.

Downstairs, in the yard to the left, she saw Bobby. It was recess for his class, and he was standing near a group of boys. Instinctively she ran toward him and cried out, 'Bobby! Bobby!'

He turned, and she saw his face crimson. She did not realize how terrible it was of her to cry out, to go to him and touch him, ask for his sympathetic understanding. For his fellows were all about him, utterly astonished at this female

creature who was guilty, in the first place, of lese-majesty in appearing on the boys' side, and who also came weeping for succor at the hands of one of their hard-hearted selves.

No, she did not realize. Only, that as her hand reached out to Bobby, he moved away.

'This isn't your side,' he told her.

'Bobby, you know me. I'm Thaisa!'

'How'd she get on to my name?' he turned to ask his companions, and moved off.

He had denied her, then! For a moment she stood, quite unable to move. Pretended not to know her!

She watched the group go by, each boy laughing and gesticulating, and after a time, she too turned.

Out in the street. New York! Formidable place! Manchester had been bustling, commercial, but there she had gone under the benign protection of those who loved her, so that the city seemed friendly and warm instead of solidly menacing.

Well, America, New York, did not want them — Father, Mother, Thaisa. And Father, poor Father, wanted to give his all. But he was more loyal to America than America to him. America did not want him. No one wanted them, really. A deep pang shook her again at thought of Bobby's denial.

She crossed Sixth Avenue, came to a narrow side street. At length she found a small park, and entering, sank down upon a bench. She was quite alone in this place. Spring, and the trees just beginning to bud. They swayed with a crooning sound. But she was in a cold, enemy world. Where was harmony and where happiness?

Again there came upon her a tremendous desire for her father. Memories flooded her. . . . His swift moods; his head uplifted to all the winds; his poetry. . . . Suddenly she put her head down on her knees and let the tears flow. A morsel of a thing, cast out upon the world.

Then she lifted her head, and before her there stood a man who had not been in the park before. He moved a step closer, and she saw that he was young. He wore no cap and the soft wind blew his hair about his brow. She saw that this hair was very black, but that on the left side there lay a lock of white, like a wing. She thought he was like the figure in the tapestry, the dancing youth.

Suddenly he brought his far gaze to her, and his lips parted in a smile. He said, 'I've been here some time, but you didn't notice me. Can you tell me the trouble?'

'I'm not happy,' she said.

'Ah, a very grave malady.'

'It's that people aren't kind to one another.'

'No, they're not.'

His eyes wandered again to something he seemed to hope for in some far land. 'Some day, a new voice shall come crying in the wilderness,' he said solemnly. 'It will teach us of the brotherhood of man.'

She leaned forward. 'Oh,' she cried, '*are you Jesus come again?*'

Thoroughly startled, he looked at her; then he sat down and put his arms about her. As she felt his sympathy, she yielded herself completely. The loneliness and sadness in a measure vanished.

'It am just an ordinary mortal, one Peter Dagmar.'

‘Peter, then, a disciple.’

‘No, I’ll not have it. Just a poor man. You mustn’t go that way putting people on pedestals. They can’t stand it, and eventually it’ll break you. What’s your name?’

‘Thaisa Worthington.’

‘Thaisa — exquisite — and just for you. How old are you, Thaisa?’

‘Nearly eleven.’

‘And I’m twenty-three. Now tell me exactly what’s troubling you.’

So, as best she could, she told him of her longing for familiar things; the longing for a place in the universe; most of all the longing for happiness, because when she was happy she could see colors and beauty.

‘An exquisite passion.’ She felt the tide of his understanding flowing out to her, and she sat silent, but warmed through and through.

‘But I suppose God just brought me across the ocean to meet you,’ she said, and lifted eyes of such faith that for a moment his own seemed blinded.

3

And then when she reached home, filled with a new essence of hope, Aunt Sarah confronted her with stern-lipped disapproval. ‘Your mother’s gone looking for you; your teacher said you’d run away.’

But that moment Jenny entered. She stood gazing at Thaisa with some new emotion manifest in her face. She was pale and her eyes were colorless, set against the dead

black of the escaping hair beneath her bonnet. 'Ah, there you are, Thaisa,' she said at length. 'I — I couldn't find you, and I thought you'd been stolen.'

Then Jenny crumpled to the floor.

Aunt Sarah was very cool and efficient. Her ministrations soon had Jenny sitting up, with eyes open. 'I don't know what you're thinking of,' she commented then, 'married as you are to an improvident ne'er-do-well.'

'Ah'll thank thee,' said Jenny, lapsing thickly into her accent, 'to keep tha opinions to thasel'.'

'Do control that awful way of speaking.' Then relentlessly: 'What are you thinking of?'

'I've thought the Almighty knows what he wants.'

'The Almighty has nothing to do with such cases,' Aunt Sarah returned tartly. 'I've managed, as you see, with only one.'

Jenny rose. 'I know your meaning. An' I'll let no grass grow under my feet to rid you of our burden.'

Thaisa followed Jenny into the bedroom. 'If I hadna lost my wits over you,' Jenny began, 'the old schoolmistress wouldn't have found out.'

'Found out what, Mother?' Thaisa sat down on the bed and took Jenny's hand. She felt sorry, and as though this other were in great need of a friend. She wanted to pour herself out. 'Tell me, Mother, and perhaps I can help.'

Jenny hesitated; then she chose her words carefully. 'It's this then, Thaisa; a wee bird has come tellin' me that you may have a little brother some day.'

'Oh, Mother, how wonderful, how beautiful!'

'Well there, your father doesn't know whether to be glad

or not, and yon schoolmistress makes me feel a sinner,' said poor Jenny. 'And 'ere are you dancin' for pure joy; it makes me feel a bit good.'

And all at once Jenny was crying in Thaisa's arms. And there rose in the small breast tides of passion to help. . . .

4

Her purest satisfaction Thaisa found in Peter; for Peter pursued the acquaintanceship begun in the small park. He came to fill her life, so that she scarcely missed Richard — a transformation subtle and mysterious. He awakened newer depths within her — a forcing of emotions. He wove himself into her life, becoming part of her mental and spiritual equipment.

Peter and Richard at once took to one another. Peter, young as he was, had roamed the world. His parents had died when he was a very young boy. Except for an aged aunt — now in San Francisco — who had reared him, Peter was absolutely alone. Two years in high school had been the extent of his formal education; but he had done much and varied reading and much traveling. There had been affiliation with a radical set and eventually a breaking away. Now he owned a tiny magazine and edited it from a basement room in Washington Place.

Richard was entranced with this history.

5

Peter it was who inaugurated a Saturday morning walk, when he and Thaisa would ramble about the city and talk. He inspired and quickened her. All her days had shapes, and since Saturday was Peter's day (he had asked her specially to dedicate it to him) she was glad it was a great white ship on which he and she embarked and sailed the misty violet sea that was New York. Peter learned from her the shapes of the different days.

'So this white ship day is mine for always, Thaisa?'

'Is it so important to you, Peter? It is terribly important to me.'

'More important than anything else in my life,' he told her gallantly. He went on: 'You're not going to escape me, now that I've found you.' And indeed she had no wish to escape him. He was more than the man Peter to her. He represented a savior, a vision, a lover and a father, a high figure in whom she put perfect trust. Peter, recognizing her adoration, was still unaware that he had come when she was empty, a little vessel tossed on life's waves; too young to know her own needs but as old as the world in her dramatic necessity for some one to worship.

On the surface, she met Peter with a childish candor of love and admiration which he rather casually accepted, since he had his own life to live and was enjoying many experiences, romantic and practical. But in her heart she enshrined him and endowed him with every great quality. He grew into her fiber, became her other identity. He was

at once a reality and a dream to her. Perfect, even when at times he kept her waiting and sent no message.

She told him one day that her family was leaving Aunt Sarah's. He and she had been walking through Central Park. 'But I must go back now, Peter, and clean the silver.'

'I wish there weren't any silver in the world,' he answered as bitterly as even she, who disliked the task, could desire.

'So do I. When I'm grown up, I'm never going to wash dishes or clean silver or sew long seams. You mustn't ask me to, if ever I come to live with you, Peter.'

'Here, here, Thaisa, the Saturday ship's careening. You quite threw me off my ballast. Do you think such an iridescent jewel as you're going to be would deign to live with such an old greybeard as I shall turn into?'

'Oh, Peter, you'll never be a greybeard; just that one white lock. We'll sing together and play, and there'll be a lot of lovely little babies come to us.'

Peter, finding it necessary to attend to the ship, didn't answer at once. But when he turned to her there was a deep, strange look in his face. 'I don't see how a man takes a child — of his own — calmly. Oh, not the traditional sentimental palaver, God forbid. Deeper than that; it's the marvel of life coming through a poor, weak man.'

She stood staring at him, not understanding at all, except that he was intensely stirred. He saw that he had frightened her a little, that she had moved away from him, and a bewildering fear grew in him. 'Thaisa, dear girl,' he cried, 'you won't ever stop loving me, will you?'

She went white at the mere thought of such blasphemy.

‘Peter,’ she cried, ‘I shall always love you, just as I do now. You’re Peter-of-my-heart.’

He removed his cap, thrust it into his pocket. ‘Then we’ll exchange everlasting vows that we belong to one another. I’ll wait for you till you’re quite grown up.’

‘We exchange everlasting vows,’ she repeated solemnly, and put her hand into his. ‘I’m going to be awfully good while I’m growing up for you, Peter.’

She was never to forget that uplifted moment in the park. In some distant, great future she was to belong to Peter, and enter into a perfect circle with him alone.

And a deep hunger, a hunger of which the young Peter was scarcely aware, made him for the moment as pure a romanticist as was Thaisa, giving him a faith that life would yield him his dreams.

So he stood with her, glimpsing himself and his needs that were not yet wholly clear to him.

6

Peter took Richard in as assistant editor of the little magazine ‘The Beacon Ray.’

Jenny wasn’t well, and Thaisa was learning to be useful. They had moved to a little flat in Waverly Place. Aunt Sarah had been generous. She had given them some old furniture that she had had stored away.

Jenny, however, wasn’t grateful for favors. ‘She’s that glad to see our backs, she’d give us anything,’ was her shrewd comment.

Richard was busily happy in his new work with Peter,

though there was little money in it. But he talked beautifully of ideals and again of the spirit of America.

‘Eh, dear me,’ Jenny answered one time, ‘how high and mighty! But you’d better forget all that and take to providin’ for your family.’

Richard stopped talking.

‘Take a good job somewhere that’s full of labor and put away silly, foolish notions. Get down to brass tacks, man.’

Richard seized his hat and ran out.

7

But Jenny was in the main happier than ever before. Young too and pretty. She never seemed to grow accustomed to Richard’s coming home at night, going away again in the morning—the family routine. This was satisfaction, even though she did complain of money lack. Sometimes now she sang as she had back there in Grandfeyther Evans’ home. Something in Thaisa answered to the color of the songs, but Richard called out once: ‘Jenny! For heaven’s sake, stop that costermonger’s stuff.’

‘Eh, but tha’rt delicate,’ Jenny commented. Even though she tried so hard to stop, occasionally she would revert to the old tongue. But she did not sing again for a long time.

Thaisa went one Saturday to the little publishing room. Richard was away and Peter was alone, setting type. ‘I’d like to write like you do,’ she began, ‘so my name could be printed in the magazine.’

‘Well, let’s see if we can’t fix that.’ Peter never could

deny any wish of hers. 'You know the purpose of the magazine?'

She shook her head. 'Only a little. . . . You want each person to have the same amount of money, don't you?'

'I want a system wherein a man can with moderate labor secure necessities and comforts.'

'Is that going to happen because of your little magazine?' she asked, worshipfully.

'I can help,' magnificently, 'but we must wrest control of the wealth-producing forces of this country from the few individuals who now control them for their own benefit.'

Peter spoke like a lecturer. She viewed him in awe, but after a time she arrived at her own thought. 'But if you could only make everybody happy doing something he likes to do, Peter,' she suggested. 'It's dreadful to have to sew a long seam when you want to dance — especially when the seam is in a piece of horrid muslin.'

'I see.'

'Something beautiful when you've finished,' she concluded. She was thinking of the tapestry in the old home in Victoria Park.

'I wish you'd write a little piece along those lines for the magazine,' he said after a moment.

'My answer will be different from yours, won't it, Peter?'

'Naturally; we all get different angles on questions. I might think that dividing money would be equality; you evidently don't think so.'

'No; but if you did think so, then you'd have to divide, wouldn't you? It won't do any good just to think something and not do it, will it?'

‘ Well, being Thaisa, you’d have to go the whole way,’ he agreed.

She pondered a great deal on what she was going to write for Peter’s magazine, that sheet which was to help change the face of the world. But at last the article was written, and she carried it to Peter. ‘ Father wrote his piece for the magazine last night too,’ she began. ‘ And here is mine.’

Peter opened the sheet of paper and began to read.

EQUALITY

I’ve been thinking about being equal. I remember a picture in my old home and how I wished the people in it would join hands and dance together. I thought that would make them even. But now I don’t know. Anyway, it isn’t in just dividing money as Peter thinks, its mostly how you feel about people. Love, and other things, coming from way inside you. Then about God, too. If the man on Fifth Avenue thought God was kind and the man on the East Side thought God was kind, then they’d be more equal and do what God wanted them to do. If they thought differently, then they wouldn’t be equal.

Peter lowered the paper and looked at her. ‘ And I shall have to wait so long before I can have you by my side to help me with all my problems!’

‘ Do you have to wait till I’m grown, Peter?’

‘ I’m afraid so.’

‘ But it won’t be so very long, Peter; I’ll grow up as fast as I can.’

He put his arm about her. ‘ I love your little article,

Thaisa. . . . Always the internal and aesthetic problem with this little girl.'

Richard came winging in bringing his sketch. Richard wrote beautifully — words Thaisa loved like 'crystal' and 'pure.' He wrote cleverly, consciously. His contribution was called:

ON KEEPING LITTLE BIRDS IN CAPTIVITY

On my grounds in England I caused to be built a large glass house to accommodate a hundred yellow song canaries whose music was crystal pure. The songsters were interesting for a time, till I wearied of them. I wearied of them because their spirits grew content and tame. Their song became impregnated with their reverence for mere food. They sang for their dinner, only.

In freedom their music was uncontaminated by motive. They went hungry, if need be, and their song was of great spiritual beauty.

So with man! In bondage his song grows less pure; let him love money and the things of money, then is he reduced to one attitude; such paucity makes of him a little creature, bound in a golden cage.

Give me, say I, a hundred attitudes, so color from every source may shine in and through me. Thus only, may I continue to be of interest to myself and to others. I shall love my own ardors, and men will enjoy my iridescence.

Richard had gone after leaving his essay with Peter.

'I shall print this,' said Peter with a smile, 'not because it particularly belongs in a radical monthly, but because it's so absolutely Richard, and Richard is worth knowing.'

8

Richard announced one day that he had decided to take a trip to Hendersville, a town near New York, on business.

‘Now it’s beginning,’ remarked Jenny. ‘You shouldn’t go away at this time.’

‘Business is business,’ Richard returned largely.

He went to Hendersville. He was delayed longer than he had expected. The new owners of the overall factory, from whom he was trying to secure advertising for Peter’s paper, were being very kind to him, he wrote, though he was having a little difficulty in persuading them that a magazine which had so small a circulation was a good medium for them. The president of the concern had invited Richard to his home.

9

It was during Richard’s absence, in the middle of the night, that Thaisa was awakened suddenly out of a deep sleep. She went into Jenny’s room and found her sitting up in bed, her lips twisted. Her eyes were quite black and filled with such a strange expression, compounded of fear and expectancy, that Thaisa stood still. . . . Jenny rose and pressed her hand on Thaisa’s shoulder.

‘Can you go and get your Aunt Sarah?’

Thaisa nodded. Her heart leapt with fear at thought of the dark streets, but she did not dream of refusing to go on this errand. She ran, head down, the blocks between

her home and Aunt Sarah's. Her violent knocks aroused Uncle Henry who, after hearing the message, departed to rouse his wife.

Back, after an age, with Aunt Sarah. 'Oh, is Mother dying?'

'No, she'll live to tell this tale and maybe many another like it,' Aunt Sarah replied grimly.

In her own room, Thaisa lay quiet. Was the doctor's black bag a wizard thing carrying life? Ordinary sense rejected this explanation, though it had been tendered once by Jenny herself as true.

No, there was something deep hidden.

10

Aunt Sarah called. Thaisa sprang from her bed and ran into the kitchen. 'Come here,' said Aunt Sarah, and when Thaisa was close to her, she opened the bundle. 'There, Jenny did a good job of it after waiting so long. Meet your brothers, Thaisa.'

Two tiny creatures lay in their blankets in a curious silence, waiting for something. Aunt Sarah gazed down at them with a dual expression, half of disapproval, half a sort of fierce covetousness.

'You can go in and see your mother for a moment, Thaisa,' Then: 'You're tuckered out. It's just like both Richard and Jenny to let a child take the brunt of their own selfishness.'

Jenny lay very quiet. Thaisa approached the bed on tip-toes. She felt that something sacred had been brought into this room. 'Well, Thaisa,' said Jenny faintly, 'the babies

are here safe and sound, thank God, though more than I reckoned for.'

Thaisa spoke quickly: 'Mother, where did they come from?'

'I told you once about that.'

'But Mother, is that true?'

Jenny paused. At length: 'A sweet, innocent little lass dost na ask such questions o' her mother.'

Some understanding deeper than her intelligence swept Thaisa. Pure romance was here being demanded — something perfect. It was Jenny's deepest soul-desire to swing her little girl back to a place from which she had this day been moved, and into which, Thaisa herself knew, she could never again fit.

But love filled her — love to give, love to erase a remorse she sensed. She was very happy, as always, when she was able to give. 'The doctor brought beautiful babies, Mother,' she said. It was as though she had taken her mother and soothed her against her breast.

II

A letter came from Richard. Aunt Sarah deliberately slit the envelope, read the letter, and then marched with it into Jenny's room, where Thaisa was holding one of the babies.

'Word from Richard,' Aunt Sarah announced. 'I'll read it to you, Jenny.'

Dear Jenny: The President of this overall and suspender factory, Emanuel Freeman, whom I expected might be

quite an ordinary sort, turned out to be a gentleman of culture and fine taste, as I believe I've already told you. He insisted upon my leaving the one atrocious hotel in town to become his guest. We talk a great deal — music and literature — and touch on some of the burning topics of the day.

I have heard nothing from home since leaving, and I trust all is well.

Richard.

P.S. Freeman, though against Peter's 'hot-headed young socialistic ideas,' and though he continues to speak somewhat disparagingly of our circulation, has made my coming to Hendersville worth while from a business standpoint.

When Aunt Sarah read the part about Richard's new friend who could talk literature and music, she looked over the paper at Jenny. 'Music and literature!' she snapped. 'If that isn't Richard! To put the real business on which he went away down in a corner of his letter; unimportant, naturally.'

'I'll take the letter now, since you've had first taste of it,' said Jenny tartly.

'I'd never have let you see it at all,' Aunt Sarah returned complacently, 'if there'd been anything in it to bother you and so hurt the babies.'

Richard arrived home late one afternoon after Aunt Sarah had left for the day. Thaisa, all excitement, met him at the door. Jenny had mysteriously decreed that he be left in perfect ignorance of the twins. Now, Thaisa whispered, 'We've something new and wonderful to show you, Father.'

He followed her into the bedroom, stood a moment quite still. 'Look, Father,' she cried, and turned down the blanket in the small basket.

'My God!' said Richard.

12

Peter didn't say 'My God' in that tone. Still, there was great awe in his face as he gazed at the babies.

Thaisa knew, after a time, that he was worried. Then he confided to her that the little magazine was hardly holding its own, and that perhaps he'd be compelled to find a job as a street car conductor; he and she having once agreed that it must be lovely to ride miles every day and just tinkle a little bell for each passenger.

'I'll help you find a job,' she said.

'You will be my inspiration always.' A glow came into his young eyes. 'The world needs you and me, Thaisa. We'll push it forward!'

He seemed a young knight to her and the white lock a wing on which to take flight.

'Peter, it will be wonderful when I'm grown up and all ready for you.'

'Very wonderful, Thaisa. We'll set out on the great adventure of seeking the beauty that means so much to you. Alone, I couldn't find it, but together . . .'

'Together we'll be able to find everything, won't we?'

'Without the slightest doubt.'

And then Peter seemed to go away from her. Whenever she went to the little publishing shop, there he sat at a small table, a deck of cards spread out before him. Solitaire!

Cobwebs covered the little printing press. There was no money in the till, and Peter had come upon hard times. But he hid himself away, looking at the bits of cardboard.

She waited; she would have helped him seek out the job of a street car conductor, but he would not notice her. And so life for her, with Peter's coldness, was meaningless.

Shortly after Christmas, the little magazine was completely suspended. Peter was left stranded, and Richard was without any position.

The babies cried a great deal, probably because Jenny was worried. 'I knew when you went in with that long-haired radical you'd made a mistake,' said Aunt Sarah to Richard one day, as she soothed a twin lying in her arms.

'Why do you persist, Sarah, in calling Peter "long-haired"?' said Richard, smiling. 'He wears his hair clipped, and I've enjoyed him.'

'You've enjoyed him because you're so much alike, I should say; and here you've come a cropper and Jenny fretting so that the babies suffer.'

'Well,' said Richard, 'we're going to move on now. Freeman wrote to me when he heard the little magazine had gone up. He suggested that I open an agency for him in Chicago. We start next week.'

Thaisa could only stand, stricken. To leave Peter! Richard knew her pain. 'Never mind, Thaisa,' he told her. 'We'll send for Peter some day.'

Peter, like Richard, said: 'Never mind, Thaisa. I'll come to Chicago before long.' She was silent after that. She had seen that Peter too was happy at the thought of change. He was off for San Francisco. His old aunt had died, but he knew many interesting people there. Her life seemed broken into. She felt desolated, abandoned.

14

Chicago! The small family left the depot on the West Side and stood uncertain which way to turn. Richard besought the aid of a policeman, and was directed east over the river. They boarded one car, then changed for a 'grip' trailer which took them out of the main business section of the city. Richard had insisted upon sitting in the 'grip' itself, and the strong chill wind from the lake blew through their thin clothing. Jenny held the babies, wrapped in one big shawl, tight against her breast.

Richard was tremendously interested in all about him, but Thaisa's heart was heavy. The leave-taking of Peter at the station in New York was still in her mind. He had held her in his arms, soothing her. 'Oh, Peter, Peter,' she had cried, 'it hurts me so to leave you.'

'But remember, Thaisa, you're just going away to grow up; then I'm coming for you.'

She lightened at that. 'But won't it be a very long time, Peter?'

‘No, the days will just run along; you’ll have so many experiences.’

As the train moved out, she stared at Peter, at Uncle Henry and at Aunt Sarah, who at the last amusingly had asked that one of the babies be left with her. Everything was strange. Even Bobby, who had denied her, looked at her now as though he liked her and was sorry she was going away. But life, she was beginning to feel, didn’t always balance.

The gripman sent the car ahead with a jerk at every plunge. Thaisa fell to thinking. It was amazing, after Aunt Sarah’s exasperation over her discovery that Jenny was going to have a baby, that later she should have craved one for herself. ‘Mother,’ she asked, ‘why did Aunt Sarah want one of the twins, when she was so angry at first?’

‘Like many another woman,’ Jenny answered, ‘Sarah’s willing to take what she can get without the pain of it.’ Her eyes were fixed on Richard in the seat ahead.

Did pain then usher in everything good and beautiful? Was that the law?

At Thirty-ninth Street Richard alighted, put down his impedimenta and turned leisurely to help his family down.

‘Don’t take all day,’ the gripman admonished.

‘My good man,’ Richard answered calmly, ‘I shall take all the time that seems necessary,’ and after assisting Jenny, he lifted Thaisa to the ground. Brave Father, who wasn’t afraid of that majestic driver.

The house they stopped at stood at the corner of Thirty-ninth Street and Ellis Avenue, two blocks west of the lake.

Miss Replica, the landlady, a tall flat-chested woman, answered their ring.

‘Come in,’ she said, after a slight hesitancy. Her eyes were fixed in a sort of fear on the round shawl that Jenny carried.

‘Mr. Freeman didn’t tell me there was a baby when he wrote engaging rooms,’ she remarked when they stood in the hall.

‘They’re twins,’ said Thaisa proudly, ‘and their names are Richard and Paul.’ A silence fell.

But it wasn’t resentment that came into Miss Replica’s faded eyes — just amazement. Jenny breathed a sigh of relief, and uncovered the cocoon bundle. The two baby heads revealed themselves. ‘I never saw the like,’ Miss Replica exclaimed. ‘Twins — your own?’ she asked Jenny in such unconcealed admiration that a little color crept into Jenny’s pale cheeks and she flung her head higher. ‘Mine!’ she replied, ‘and as perfect a pair as were ever born.’

Miss Replica shook her head as at a wonder quite beyond her human calculation. She led the way up a narrow flight of stairs, very dim, down a hall to a suite of two rooms, one of which overlooked the station of the Illinois Central Railroad. ‘I hope you’ll like them,’ she said anxiously. ‘At any rate, they’re all I have now. You can cook light meals here or go out to a restaurant.’

‘They’re very nice, I’m sure,’ said Richard, speaking for the first time and at once, as always, attracting a special attention. ‘And I think we shall eat out for the present.’

Jenny looked straight at him, but she made no comment

on his grandeur. That night, Miss Replica brought down a cradle from the attic. 'However it got there I don't know,' she said, 'but it will be handy.' Besides the cradle, there was a cot for Thaisa, so they were pretty well crowded, what with the big walnut bed and all. But Miss Replica was kind, and her wondering attitude toward Jenny and the twins never ceased.

15

But Richard wasn't very successful with the overall agency, and after a while Jenny was forced to tell Miss Replica that they couldn't really afford to keep the rooms at ten dollars a week, even with the privilege of cooking in the tiny kitchen. And so with regrets they moved away. The beginning of the next winter found them settled in a four room flat in the rear of a brick building out south on Dearborn Street.

'Your father hates the business; it's not rosy enough for him,' said Jenny one day to Thaisa. 'Mark my words, it'll go soon.'

A prophecy! Richard was about to throw up the job when a courteous letter arrived from Mr. Freeman—a warm appreciation of all that Richard had tried to accomplish. There was no blame given, but the conclusion was that undoubtedly Richard's great talents were worthy of some project less material than that of selling overalls.

Richard read the letter to Jenny one evening after the twins were in bed and while Thaisa sat at the kitchen table studying her home work. She knew by the lift in his voice

that he was pleased with the letter. But Jenny's eyes flashed. 'Fine flattery puts no food into empty stomachs,' she commented.

Richard was thrown back. He shook his head a little as though cold water had been dashed upon him. 'I'll get something else very soon,' he muttered.

16

Letters came from Peter. In one, he told Thaisa he was off for Mexico; that she should not worry if she did not hear from him for some time. There might be months when he would be out of the beaten path. He bade her not to forget him. As if she could forget!

They moved about a great deal. Once, for a few months, they lived in two tiny rooms, but Richard encouraged his family by reminding them of how much warmer they could keep when they were so close together. Then there was the winter when they were domiciled in a house whose entire front had been cut away, and Thaisa's hair had frozen to the wall one night. Richard, unemployed, endeavored to make the children forget their cold and their hunger. He sat in the kitchen with an old chair near him and pretended its back was a harp, while he sang funny songs about being marooned on an iceberg. Jenny was away somewhere earning a dollar. But Richard made the children laugh. And Thaisa knew her father also was hungry.

There were different schools and different sets of children to laugh at strange made-over garments and torn boots. Once, in an agony, Thaisa told Richard of these trials. He answered, 'The rabble, my dear, always laugh at their betters.' But this time Richard's words gave little comfort. Still, she had to stick it out. In winter, biting cold fingers and blue lips. In summer, wretched small rooms that were unmercifully hot. Illnesses. . . . Lying palely in bed, while Jenny made interminable onion soup, and Richard, returning downcast from his searches, would cast off his gloom like a cloak, and while he rubbed Thaisa's aching little limbs he would 'say poetry' to her. Malnutrition, undoubtedly. But she grew stronger after a while.

There were days when Richard absolutely refused to 'buck the commercial game,' and he remained at home, while Jenny went out somewhere and returned with two dollars she had earned. (Boxing starch in a starch factory, Thaisa afterwards learned.) The little boys, happy and exhilarated, told Jenny of a game their father had invented, and Thaisa repeated to her a real story about a King who reigned over Star Countries and had a ship he could fly in. Jenny, in answer, murmured something about poetry and worn finger tips.

But then, Jenny grumbled a great deal, sometimes wondering where the next meal's meat was to come from. She formulated all sorts of plans, like taking a job in a store, or going out to care for the quality's children. 'Couldn't you just ask God, Mother?' Thaisa ventured.

Jenny stared: 'What do you mean?'

'Just ask him to provide. You know the hymn says: "The Lord will provide."'

'And sit with idle hands, waiting.'

Thaisa pondered. 'Well, I like Father's way better.'

'Look sharp! What do you mean?'

'Father's singing and poetry.'

'You can have those and an empty stomach.'

'I wouldn't mind that, Mother, if I had to choose.'

'No, being a Worthington you'll never take life in a practical way. You'll always go on top of your mountain, a proud lass, and flaunt at them that's near you.'

Thaisa stood white and silent. 'Now then,' Jenny cried, 'what do you mean? Wipe that look off your face! I'm every bit as good as you are, even if my mither did sell kerchiefs off Nottingham Mill Stones, and thy grandmither ne'er wet her hands. You'll not come her high and mighty ways over me.'

Memory returned in a flood. Grandfeyther Evans! Jenny sounded like him, looked like him at the moment. . . .

'Get about dusting that front room now, and no more nonsense.'

Thaisa went draggingly to this dull duty.

After a time Jenny, who was not at all religious, joined a church. 'Rich and powerful' had been her words regarding the church, and nothing whatever said of the spirit.

Jenny maneuvered that Richard and Thaisa should attend services on Sunday morning. Richard was very distin-

guished looking in his Prince Albert coat and a shining tall hat. People spoke to them, and Richard answered in quick, light words. Thaisa knew he was accepted, and she was conscious of women pressing about — of heavy scents. How splendid her father looked as he talked, his silk hat held against his breast. His face was lifted high, and his thick, dark hair grew away from a forehead she thought noble.

Jenny, on the other hand, never attended church. But she grew to be very charitable and went every Tuesday to the parish house to make garments for the church poor and to sew on sheets and pillow slips for the hospital which the church helped to support. She worked under a Mrs. Van Valkenberg, Thaisa's new Sunday School teacher.

Now Jenny began to manage wonderfully on what little money Richard was able to give her — Richard who was moving about from pillar to post, and never settled. Always there was good food; sometimes there were luxuries like fried chicken and little French cakes, which Jenny would usually bring home in a small box after she had finished her sewing at the parish house. She even produced a complete new dress for Thaisa, which she had bought at a bargain, she confided. It was too large, but she ripped it and made it over.

But once Jenny was greatly disturbed. A neighbor had come to visit on one of the afternoons Jenny was away, and Thaisa, led on, innocently told of Jenny's whereabouts. Later, Jenny took Thaisa to task. ' . . . You see what comes of giving away my business,' she cried. ' That besom next door turned up at the Society this afternoon! '

Thaisa, puzzled, could not understand. But Jenny made

it all very plain. 'The poor, sacrificing creature comes to do her bit, and the ladies give her a place at one of the machines. Now remember, Thaisa Worthington, she's not to set foot in my house again whilst I'm away. You remember!'

Thaisa, mystified, gave her promise. 'I'll not talk to her again, Mother, but I'll never understand why she shouldn't help.'

'Don't try to understand what's beyond you then,' Jenny advised. 'That woman had no right to work herself in on my province, and you let it go at that.'

19

The next day Richard left his last job with a collection agency. 'Such work deadens me,' he told Jenny. 'I'd rather starve.'

She regarded him helplessly. 'Deadens! Deadens!' She gave it up. After a while she spoke carefully, feeling her way.

'You've made friends with some of the fine people in the church and you go to their homes sometimes. They'd help you if you'd ask — put you in the way of earning good money.'

He looked straight back at her. 'Is that why you were so anxious to have me join the church? Well, Jenny, I'll have to disappoint you.'

'Go on with your dreaming, then,' she returned sharply.

'Mother, couldn't you go with Father into the Land of Dreams,' Thaisa inquired, after Richard had gone away.

‘Land o’ dreams, nonsense. . . . I’ve never had time for dreams.’

‘Maybe you will now that I’m nearly a woman, Mother. I’ll work so that you can rest.’

It was true; Thaisa was growing up.

20

As she grew into womanhood, she reached out more and more for beauty of spirit and of equality. In Reba Van Valkenberg she found beauty of person and ideas, combined with a certain restlessness. She spoke to Jenny about inviting Reba to their home.

Jenny turned in amazement. ‘Invite her here?’

‘I’d love to; she’s so darling.’

‘Reba Van Valkenberg who lives in that mansion?’

‘I don’t understand, Mother.’

‘There you go again looking like your lady grandmother. You can’t invite the quality into your poor home.’

This kind of thinking was out of Thaisa’s understanding. Reba was lovely, though Thaisa did not like Mrs. Van Valkenberg and her pretensions. When she went to the Michigan Avenue home to a Christmas party, Mrs. Van Valkenberg’s efforts to impress her quite failed. Only she hated the woolen dress that Jenny mysteriously made her wear instead of one of the pretty frocks she had made over.

Though she disliked Mrs. Van Valkenberg, Thaisa admired the tall, scholarly man who studied butterfly lore, and to whose arm Reba clung lovingly, or whose hair she ruffled as she drawled, ‘. . . My dear parent, you do not know

anything. . . .' She liked the manner in which he handed out to the guests small envelopes containing crisp five-dollar bills.

But it was from this same party that Thaisa returned home to Jenny so indignant. . . . She burst into the house and began her story at once: 'Mother, Ellen Garret said she'd like an amber necklace sometime because it had a beautiful sparkle; it would make her happy just to look at it.'

'Well?' Jenny stiffened in attention. She was always afraid of Thaisa's strange notions.

'Mrs. Van Valkenberg said she was looking above her class, and that she should learn to be a straight-walking, God-fearing girl, and ended by telling her that a flannel petticoat was what she should ask for.'

'As I should say very sensible,' Jenny returned, relaxing. 'Now don't get so worked up, Thaisa; you're trembling.'

'But Mother, you don't understand; Reba Van Valkenberg was standing near all the time, dressed in soft white. And she was wearing a shining necklace — then Mrs. Van Valkenberg offering Ellen a flannel petticoat when she was dying for beauty! It isn't just!'

'Did you say anything like that to Mrs. Van Valkenberg?' Jenny asked, in a voice of deep concern.

'No, I just couldn't speak; something choked me.'

'Well then, know on which side your bread is buttered, and keep your tongue within your cheek!'

'What do you mean, Mother?'

'Just what I say. Face the truth; you have to live, and you haven't a father as can ever earn money.'

'But what has money to do with beauty and fairness?'

‘See here, my girl, I don’t know what you mean, always talking about beauty. If you want beauty, go and walk down to the lake when the moon shines on it. . . .’

‘Oh, not that kind of beauty, Mother — something deeper, something coming from inside you. . . . I can’t explain.’ She stopped: ‘Do you remember the tapestry that hung in Grandmother’s drawing room? Well, that was beautiful, but even there you always waited for something. . . .’

‘Waited for something?’

‘Yes. . . . I used to stand and hope that those men and women going on some journey would take hands — together. . . . But only one of them seemed — free — because he didn’t care. . . .’ So she faltered.

‘Eh, you’re a strange one — you and your father. His jobs drag him down or bore him, while I say work’s work. And you’re always wanting something perfect. And you’ll never get it, let me warn you. Take a leaf out of my book, and seize what you can get.’

‘Oh, Mother, how horrible!’ Passionately: ‘If I can’t have everything, I’ll not just take anything. I’d rather die!’

Jenny looked into the intense young face. ‘Well, you’ll suffer sore before you learn not to care. . . .’

Some flash illumined Thaisa. ‘It isn’t just not caring,’ she said, feeling her way, ‘it’s a *holy indifference*. . . .’ The color came up into her face, and she felt an embarrassment before Jenny’s wide, laughing eyes.

‘Well, have it your own way,’ Jenny returned, wholly at sea, ‘but I repeat you’ll save yourself many a heartache if you’ll stop this looking for beauty in people and in things. Just take life as it is, say I.’

Occasionally Richard dined out. Thaisa was proud of him when he sallied forth in his frock coat and high hat which were now growing a bit shabby. He had made friends with the quality, as Jenny put it. In one way, it was to be seen that she was very proud of his estate; in another, darkly angered.

But at night, Thaisa would awaken to high, hard words from Jenny and wonder if that was the way Jenny took life as it was — and no answer from Richard. That silence of his was cold and bitter and could be felt like a sharp wind.

‘. . . like your father. . . .’ These words floated out one night and a quick answer, ‘. . . If that is true, I could wish your way like my mother’s. . . .’

Silence. Thaisa, ice cold, and trembling in her small bed, wondered if her parents had been struck dead.

But soon Jenny’s voice rose high and shrill again. ‘So that I know where you are . . .’

‘Better get a chain and ball.’

And suddenly like a torrent let loose — Jenny crying, and Richard’s ice-voice so like Grandmother’s, ‘. . . Kindly have the decency to remember the children. . . .’

‘. . . love. . . . Oh, the sorrow it brings a woman.’

‘Love! . . .’ Thaisa buried her head beneath the pillow. And thought of Peter.

And Richard went away and remained away for weeks. And there was no money. Jenny worked hard at whatever she could find to do.

‘Can’t you rest, Mother?’ Thaisa asked.

‘Rest! There’s no rest for that horse as can work, my lass. No, I’ll just have to take in plain sewing.’

‘I’ll help, Mother. I’ll earn some money.’

‘Eh, do you think you could?’ Gratitude rose in Jenny’s voice, and Thaisa felt new powers opening within her.

22

She put away her books and went forth. She found, at last, a position in an ornate candy shop in Thirty-fifth Street where she was to work every day from eleven till ten at night for ten dollars a week. This was wonderful, only that she was frightened, when her work was over for the day, to traverse the dark streets to her home. But she did not tell Jenny this.

The proprietor was one Kraus, a fat man who had once been handsome in a vulgarly decorative way, but was now at middle age and dreadfully shop worn. He was affectionate of manner, and he kindly pressed her arm as he gave her directions. His eye was appraising; he relished personalities: ‘You’re quite the little woman. I like you in that snug jersey.’ His glance scorched her. He was increasingly affectionate when he taught her how to mix soda water with chocolate flavoring. She felt his breath on her cheek when he explained the intricacy of weighing licorice caramels. She moved away from him, a nausea upon her.

The shop was located near a high school, and the tall young lads began frequenting it of an evening, as they had

not before Thaisa's advent. Each stopped for a word with her, but though she flashed grey-black eyes at them, she was sedately conscious of her duties to Mr. Kraus.

She was really mostly interested in the tinkle of the soda as it fell in a sparkling stream from the fountain into tall glasses; the pure white ice cream and the rich brown of the melted chocolate. She loved the delicate white candies, spun-glass mounds, sugared rose petals. Very soon, however, she learned to put bags of candy down on the glass show case, to avoid contact with warm hands. From chance touches, she shrank painfully.

Mr. Kraus, watching from his high stool in the cashier's pulpit, called her to him at the end of the evening.

'Dearie,' he began, 'it ain't good business for you to be so high and mighty with the boys.'

She didn't know what he meant.

'Why, I saw at once you'd bring in trade. You got eyes to wheedle a bird off a tree. You just go ahead and use them.'

It was all too puzzling. A shiver of distaste shook her; she hated all ugliness, and this man was ugly. She moved away quickly from the horrid covetousness she saw in his face.

One night, when it was nearly closing time, Kraus spoke to her again. She had been working for him a month. 'Trade's better,' he told her. 'You're a bit more friendly with the boys, I can see that.'

'I didn't know I'd changed.'

He stood so close to her that an emotion of disgust swept

her, making her faint. She polished the silver chocolate urn and tried to move away from him, but he followed her, always close beside her.

The door opened, and Richard walked in. He came straight to the counter and, quite ignoring Kraus, said, 'Put on your hat and coat, Thaisa; we're going home.'

When she stood ready for the street, Kraus spoke: 'I'm very much pleased with your girl; anybody can see she's yours, she's so much like you. I was thinking of raising her wages.'

'She's not coming back,' said Richard looking quite over Kraus's head.

23

Rain was falling softly into the warm April night. Richard, who held an umbrella, opened it. 'Take my arm, Thaisa,' he invited. . . . "When I came home and found you gone! . . ."

How wonderful and protecting was this close intimacy, so different from the loneliness of the nights when she had scurried, shaking and frightened, through black streets.

He turned to survey her. 'It's frightful to think a daughter of mine should be working in such a place. . . . I shall start looking into a college for you.'

She said: 'College? I should like that, Father. And I'm glad, in a way, that I don't have to go back to that candy shop. I didn't like the man there. He always spoke so close to my ear, as though I were deaf. And I hated his touching me when he showed me how to do things!'

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She felt the sudden tremble of his arm against her own. 'I'll kill him!' he cried. The passion in his voice frightened her. 'No, no, Father, come along; it doesn't matter now.' She urged him on, and after a time he fell in step with her again.

It was all so alluring — this close walk, refreshing her spirit that had felt so bruised. The rain fell with a soft rhythm on the umbrella; the sidewalks, wet and glistening, seemed to stretch out, beckoning to some far and charming country where fathers and daughters walked always arm in arm in a sweet and satisfying companionship. She was swung back to those days when he spelled her whole world — before Peter came.

'I'm always going to remember tonight, Father.'

'So am I, Thaisa. But some day, soon now, you'll walk down a lane with another, in whom you'll see a god and who will see in you the reality of all his dreams.'

'That will be Peter.' She said it in such exquisite simplicity that he drew her closer. Then he looked down at her face, upturned to his and illumined by a street lamp. The deeps of his fatherhood came up. 'Thaisa, my daughter, you will be loved. . . . I should like to spare you — the disillusion.' And then: 'Don't ask too much of mere man.'

They went on very close together.

Jenny was annoyed at Richard's interference, for she had thought that Thaisa was doing very well. She laughed at the idea of college, though she had known that Richard



would feel the great necessity of a Worthington's being well educated.

But Richard forgot about college for Thaisa. One of the women of the church intended to put on a pretentious play, the proceeds to go to charity, and she enlisted Richard's aid.

This was work after his own heart. He emptied his pockets for Jenny and marched away. The ballroom of the great house was to be transformed into a theatre; a stage was to be built. He saw long, happy days before him.

'Bring the twins over some day,' he said to Thaisa the first morning he left, and she nodded.

'The quality's not good pay,' said Jenny, 'and Richard never thinks of money.'

So Thaisa went out again and found a place with Madam Lester, the beauty expert with a salon on Michigan Avenue. To Thaisa, Madam Lester seemed a royal creature arrayed in a gorgeous garment of flame-colored silk that tightly sheathed her opulent figure. Her hair was richly golden; her face glowed like a hard gem.

She took Thaisa on at once. 'It will all be very easy,' she said. 'Just tell the ladies you use my preparations.'

Madam Lester put Thaisa into a black silk frock, creamed and powdered her face, skilfully rouging the fair skin. The slim body was delicately curved at bosom line. This sudden maturity was wrought by a hidden little pneumatic trifle — Madam Lester's own invention.

Miss Thomas, Madam Lester's assistant, initiated Thaisa into her duties. The program was always to be the same: a patient given the privilege of a short talk with Madam Lester in her scented parlor; Thaisa summoned to stand —



tall, sweet, grave. 'Another of my patients,' — Madam Lester's honeyed accents — 'You should have seen her skin when first she came to work for me; marvelous results in a very short time.' And Thaisa — wrapping up a dozen jars and bottles.

She grew to feel very sorry for the seekers after beauty. They looked so joyless, and she fervently hoped that the elixir of youth which daily she wrapped for them would bring them happiness. Perhaps that was the answer in this strange world. Everybody beautiful, everybody happy — a perfect balance. Not, as Peter used to say, to wrest control of the money from the few and divide it up. No, Madam Lester had discovered the secret — to change ugliness into beauty. She grew tremendously to admire Madam Lester, the altruist, who gave her all to this wonderful work.

This passion she conceived for Madam Lester, both for her personal beauty and for her working out her own seemingly noble purpose in the world, made her tremble when in the elder woman's presence. Madam Lester's beautiful white hands, wandering among the alabaster jars, thrilled her. She worked late on several nights a week that she might be near the charmed one.

Madam Lester was to move on to St. Louis, leaving Miss Thomas in charge. The day before her departure something happened — Thaisa never knew just what — but when she arrived at the shop, the atmosphere was thunderous. Miss Thomas barely jerked her head in Thaisa's direction

and went on arranging small articles in the cases. But as Thaisa started toward Madam Lester's room, Miss Thomas said quickly, 'Don't go in; she's on a rampage.'

'A rampage!'

'Yes; just because profits didn't show as much as she'd like. And they're big enough — the old miser!'

Thaisa, however, went on to Madam Lester's room. Her black silk frock was always kept there. She knocked and pushed open the door as usual. 'Get out!' a voice screamed.

Was this old, worn, horrible woman Madam Lester? There was no doubt of it. She stood near a window, clad in a shapeless 'wrapper.' Her thin hair was pulled straight back from a high, lined forehead. Her face held a thousand drooping lines. Ugly, old, repulsive.

'Oh, it's you!' cried Madam Lester. She waddled to a hook, pulled down the black frock and flung it across the room. 'Put it on!' she shrieked. 'And then if you can't earn as much today as you ought, get out!'

Thaisa stared a moment at the distorted face before her; then with no word she turned and walked out of the place.

'And you walked out without your money?' Jenny asked.

'Yes, she was so ugly!'

'Ugly! Ugly! And what's that got to do with work?'

'Everything, Mother. You don't understand.'

'Don't I, though? It takes a Worthington to understand, I suppose. It was the same way at the candy shop where you were earning good money. I've a good mind to

make you march straight back, old as you are, and demand what's owing to you.'

'I wouldn't do that, Mother,' Thaisa returned, gazing straight back at Jenny.

'Now, I'm sick and tired of your airs — proud as Lucifer!' Jenny cried out in uncontrollable wrath.

Thaisa stood quite still; she thought Jenny herself very unbeautiful at this moment. 'Now then, don't look at me that way, you young faggot.' Jenny's voice rose.

Thaisa still remained, impenetrable.

'The spit and image of your lady grandmother and I hated her, her airs and her coldness. . . . Yes, you'll go into ice, just as she did.'

Jenny could not see into a quivering young heart. She struck out: 'I'll melt you out of ice. Look sharp, while I tell you . . .'

A nerve stirred in the proud young face. 'I don't want to hear, Mother. . . .' presciently.

'You'll hear, my lady! How do you think we'd have lived all these years if I hadn't held my cup even with the ladies of the church — if I hadn't frightened that cheeky besom that once came snooping — frightened her clean out of the way? And have you or your father ever asked where we got this or that?'

She paused with true dramatic sense. 'No! And all the work I've gone to. . . . Where'd you think you got your pretty dresses and buckled slippers to graduate in? Whistled off the trees? No! . . . I went to Mrs. Van Valkenberg's and got the dress for you — dyed it a different color and made it over.



‘Now, my proud lass, what do you think of that? Frettin’ and frettin’ you were, wantin’ a pretty dress — and a dollar here and a dollar there, comin’ from your father — and, no, I mustn’t disgrace the family name and stoop to charity. And you’re dragged away from the candy shop, and things would be better some day — some day, when more poetry would come with work. . . .

‘Well, I went one night to Mrs. Van Valkenberg’s — over to her fine mansion. Don’t think I were in love with my job, goin’ round to a back door and hearin’ the big dogs strainin’ at their chains to get at me. . . . But my girl were going to graduate tidied up as good as any!’

Something smote deep into Thaisa. . . . She cried out, ‘No, no, Mother — to go begging for me! . . . *Mother!*’

‘That’ll do, Miss, namin’ things that way. . . . One of the uppity servants they keep in this country opened the back door, and I told her I wanted to see Mrs. Van Valkenberg. She were for shuttin’ me out, but quick I pushed in and walked behind her into the servants’ dinin’ room.

“Mrs. Van Valkenberg is busy,” says she.

“I’ll wait till she’s not, then,” says I, and sat down. She stared right at me, and I stared her down. Out she flaunted.

‘She left the door open and I heard voices from the parlor, and whose voice were it I heard talkin’ high things beyond my poor understandin’?’

‘I don’t know, Mother.’

‘*Your father’s*. There he were in the parlor, sittin’ on a velvet chair belike, and smilin’ and being smiled at, more than belike, and listened to. Music and literature, as your Aunt Sarah would have said. . . . *Music and literature* —

things without life — and I comin' for something to clothe the nakedness of his only daughter — a Worthington.'

'Oh, Mother, Mother — please! . . .'

'You'll have to stand till the finish now. The servant comes back, wi' Mrs. Van Valkenberg following her, a bit of curiosity breakin' into her smugness. She comes shimmerin' in, all drenched with scent, and says she in her high voice, ". . . Well, my good woman, and what can I do for you? "

'And I spoke. . . . I remembered well enough what once you told me of her handin' out a flannel petticoat in place of a glitterin' necklace, and very humbly I says, " Just a worn little dress, Mrs. Van Valkenberg. Something mayhap your daughter wears at the Girls' Friendly Society so as not to make those lower than her too envious. . . ." And she brightens considerably at that and says, " Wait a minute. . . ."

'Well, I got the dress, a prettier one than if I hadn't been so canny. " There must be more," says she, returning with dress and slippers. " Reba tires so quickly of her clothes. But I haven't time to look around. Perhaps later — some other time. We have a guest," she finishes, and: " Mary, give this person a cup of tea in the kitchen." '

Thaisa — dead white, trembling, clasping and unclasping her hands. . . . 'She's a wicked, unjust woman to entertain Father as an equal and send you to the kitchen! '

Jenny laughed — a short, harsh sound. 'You don't think, do you, she knows my real name? That I'm related to your

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father? She's never seen us together, has she? I've taken good care of that. I laid all my plans when I saw we'd sink or swim, accordin' to my labors. Nay, in my church work I'm Mrs. O'Hara, a hard workin', deservin' widow, with a little family to support.'

And then suddenly, for the first time in her life, Thaisa fainted and lay, a white, crumpled heap on the floor. . . .



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PART THREE

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I

COME and visit us,' Richard Worthington wrote to Peter Dagmar. Peter who for the last year had been settled in Chicago, in a North Side studio, was stirred to accept the invitation.

Richard's newsy letter had been sent on from Peter's old San Francisco address. Intensely interested, Peter read that the Worthington family was living in a Portland town, Ranger by name. Richard had bought a hop farm. Hop farm for Richard! Peter grinned. He had tired of work in a small stock theatre in Chicago and had longed for contrasts. On the farm he had found them. A small amount down, monthly payments, and now, in a short time, the farm would be wholly his own.

He spoke of Thaisa. A woman grown and a most interesting person to her father. Peter undoubtedly would enjoy her.

Peter put the letter down. He was thirty now, but in him seemed the eternal spirit of youth. His thick hair was still black with the noticeable silver wing. Youth and the eager vitality of youth were his, but there was a certain expression in his face which betokened that he had found life unresponsive to a deep and hidden hunger.

He looked at the letter again. Thaisa! He recalled, as he had not for years, the 'ship days' in New York — days voyaged with a child's hand clasping his — a child with

worshiping, uplifted eyes. What a darling she had been! In fancy again he could see the small, pointed face, the full, sensitive lips.

So, thinking of her, he felt that the meeting in the park, the ship days and the absurd vow once exchanged were not incidents to Thaisa, but beauties ordained. And in a sharp, delightful sensation, he felt at one with her in this faith, as he had in that moment in the park.

But immediately he laughed at the absurdity. The years had taught him that man's dreams seldom see fulfillment.

An absurdity! And until Richard's letter came, awakening memories, the entire experience was submerged — almost forgotten. He had lived his life, moving about from place to place as fancy dictated. Two years before, he had landed in Chicago, his funds low, to attach himself to the staff of the Little Advocate Magazine, a venture that soon passed out. A faint disappointment had touched him when he found the Worthington family had gone before his arrival.

Just at present he was free-lancing, writing articles concerned with new and old freedom, and sometimes short stories which he found very difficult to sell. He was aching to get at a play.

Other men, at some time in their lives, settled down. Peter seemed always searching for something to satisfy an inner ache, an ache that had grown with the idle years. He was fastidious and, in his experiences with women, always came out with saddened and disillusioned heart.

He thought of himself as not particularly romantic, but there was a deep necessity to find himself at the center of

some universe. This idea he would have laughed at, but what need was it that kept him so restless, so eternally on the move?

Always searching, yet hating as a sentimentality the secret desire; plunging for weeks into labor, when he would write incessantly, trying to chain into words something deeply felt; often, at the end of these exhausting periods, tearing into fragments the pages he had written.

Once, after a dark night of remorse that followed a month of hard and riotous living, he had tramped from his North Side studio far out to Jackson Park, attempting to discover by actual observation how many men looked as though they were glad of the boon of life. In the fifteen-mile trip, he counted four men who walked with their heads up.

Returning, he shuffled the papers on his desk to one side and built squares and triangles out of his set of black and white dominoes. He kept at this work till far into the night.

But now, thinking of Richard's invitation, decision came quickly. He would go to Ranger to see Thaisa — who must be now about eighteen — her amazing father and the picturesque Jenny. The twins too would be quite grown out of babyhood.

A feeling of destiny came to him, and a little chill. . . . Warning. But Peter was accustomed to flinging his cap over the windmill. He went on with his preparations for departure.



## 2

Peter, of course, should have telegraphed to Ranger of his coming. But it pleased his dramatic sense simply to drop off one summer day at Portland, and from there, directed by a farmer, to make his way by interurban to within five miles of Richard's farm.

A low wagon stood near the interurban terminal, and in this vehicle Peter rode interestedly toward Thaisa — the old driver being evidently glad to make a dollar.

The countryside was lovely. Clusters of the square hop blossoms were yellowing; the distinctive hop odor enticed and aroused. Strange sense of movement filled him. He felt an urge to walk, and inquiring how far it was before they would make the Worthington farm, he alighted and started on his way.

A good mile, and he was glad to prolong anticipation. Thrill there was in the thought of meeting this child of earlier years, but with it now a new, unaccountable emotion. It was as though Thaisa and he had never separated — as though she had been growing along by his side, mixing into his life in a strange and beautiful way.

He laughed at himself, thinking the hop incense had affected him with weird dreams. Soon he neared the farm, which he recognized by landmarks pointed out to him by the old driver. A farm! A shack rather, set back from the road — but this building he could examine later. For the moment, his entire attention was taken up by a sight, at once disturbing and exhilarating.

In the road, which was lined on both sides by trees, a boy and a girl were pitching ball. The girl wore a shrunken gingham dress, a washed-out lavender that clung, revealing soft and promising maturities, beautiful hints of perfections yet to be. Peter's heart at once told him that this was Thaisa.

The boy, in cotton breeches and sleeveless shirt, his blond hair flying in the wind, seemed perfect complement for the girl. Their lovely bodies leaped for the ball, crept along the ground to its hiding place, mingled, separated. Their voices rose ecstatically. Unfettered youth at play.

The boy threw the ball; the girl caught it, held it against her breast, while her partner waited impatiently for the return. 'Oh, come on,' cried the boy impatiently, 'throw the ball, Thaisa.'

'Come and get it,' the girl replied tantalizingly.

The boy sprang toward her, his lithe body seeming to fly through the air. Together they struggled until the girl, in a motion of living grace, turned and flung the ball far from her. She laughed ringingly, while the lad in quick chase went after the prize.

Peter, standing there unseen, knew a strange emotion. He seemed to be gazing upon a picture complete in every detail. Two exquisite creatures, vibrant with life, moving to some ripe completion.

For a high moment, an impulse seized him to vanish quietly as he had come; not to mix himself into this picture. The impulse was so strong that he did half turn, and then the girl's laughter rang out again. So sweet a sound from which to banish himself! In a moment Peter hurried forward. He must have made a slight noise that reached the girl's



ears. She turned, gazed at him. Then Peter swept off his cap, revealing the silver wing. . . . He stepped nearer, was about to call her name, but she cried out first.

*'Peter, Peter! . . .'* She stood regarding him, a strange look in her eyes, as though some portrait for long identified with her life, then in the natural course of things fading, had again taken on living contours.

Once more, in the face of her strange, half-frightened expression, the impulse came to him to turn away. But, absurdly, the girl herself began to run toward the shack that lay back a hundred feet from the road.

The lad returned, stared at Peter and then after Thaisa's retreating figure. Peter, smiling now, went at a leisurely pace toward the shack. Thaisa in her flight had left the door open, and Peter going up the three steps, gazed within. He could see into one large room, unpapered, with rough plaster. There were undoubtedly other rooms leading out on either side. The wind must sigh through thin plank floors. Of course, with Jenny's hand at the helm, the place was scrupulously clean.

As he paused, a woman came through a back door and straight through the large room to where he stood. He knew her at once, even though her hair was greying a little and she seemed to have put on more flesh. She looked more content than he remembered. He said, 'How do you do, Mrs. Worthington? I'm Peter Dagmar.'

'Well,' she answered, 'is that what set her off? Come in, I'm glad to see you; Richard and the boys are helping out at the MacFarland place.'

'I hope I didn't frighten Thaisa.'



Jenny lifted her voice reprovingly. 'Thaisa! Thaisa! What'll your old friend think of you?'

Silence; then a sound in the adjoining room, and Thaisa appeared. 'Now then,' said Jenny, 'come and shake hands with some one you used to think the sun rose and set by.'

Crimson color flamed into Thaisa's face. With a quick glance at Jenny, she came forward, held out a hand that trembled, and said, 'I'm glad to see you, Peter.'

He took the hand close within his own, hoping to steady her. But he himself felt far from steady. The warm fingers trembling within his clasp disturbed his pulses. 'There's water to be got,' said Jenny in her quick voice.

Thaisa turned at once. Through the window, a moment later, Peter saw her drawing water from a primitive well. She used a five gallon coal-oil can with a rigged up handle.

He started forward, but Jenny stopped him. 'Thaisa does that every day, and besides, when she gets strung up, I put her to work of that kind.'

Peter, helpless, said nothing. All that he could register at the moment was that Jenny's accent seemed almost gone. . . .

The twins came in later. These boys had been babies when Peter had last seen them, trussed in a large Paisley shawl. Now they were independent beings, strutting about in small sailor suits. They were alike, yet Paul was delicate of feature like Thaisa; the other, Richard, seemed of the spirit of Jenny, composed of rich realities.

But it was Richard the elder, coming at twilight, who next to Thaisa, chiefly interested Peter. The same poetic figure, still slender. Full of life and dancing quality. The years

seemed not to have taken from him. Peter saw that nothing would for long hold him to the ground. He welcomed Peter now to his shack as high-handedly as though he received him in the old Victoria Park home.

‘Sorry I wasn’t here when you arrived, Dagmar, but I was visiting friends near by.’

Jenny’s face shadowed, and Peter felt a tenseness in the atmosphere.

### 3

It came about naturally that Peter stayed on. A corner in the twins’ room was fixed for him by Jenny and, utterly charmed by this new life, he settled himself down.

Richard would not hear of money exchange, but Peter helped in every way possible — by working in the fields; going with Thaisa to distant orchards for wild berries to be canned for what might prove a very thin winter; hoeing around the hop vines to keep them free from weeds; caring for the few chickens; and at times walking behind Richard as he drove a hand plow between the rows.

This last job, however, he soon relinquished. Jenny made it known that this was a task she especially liked. And Peter knew that so long as she could be near Richard she was happy.

But Peter’s real interest centered in Thaisa. He found her now a strange mixture of frankness and reserve, the product of all that had gone to make her. A lovely, shy young creature, but confused and dominated by Jenny’s sharp tongue.



Working in the fields with Richard, he thought of her constantly, and yet tried to turn his thoughts aside, feeling danger not only to Thaisa, but to himself.

Returning to lunch one day from the fields he paused when he neared the shack, for in the road Thaisa stood talking with the young lad of Peter's first day. 'Oh, Peter,' Thaisa cried, 'here is Ian Trevor.'

The boy—he was, thought Peter, about twenty—held out a brown hand. He had a firm grip, and his face was strong too with beautiful, clean lines of youth and race.

'Do you like it out here on the farms?' he asked in straightforward manner. 'I do. . . .'

'It's all very interesting,' Peter replied. Watching this boy with the fine, uplifted head and the flowing, blond hair, Peter felt old.

'I thought you might come over to a dance tonight out Farwell Road,' said the boy, turning directly to Thaisa.

But Thaisa's eyes were fixed on Peter. 'I couldn't,' she said gently.

'Well, I'll be off then,' The boy, with a nod, turned and was gone.

Peter knew. Ian Trevor was devouringly, passionately in love with Thaisa. 'Who is he?' he asked Thaisa, when they were alone.

'Mrs. MacFarland's nephew; he's twenty-one. He's studying to be an engineer. He means to do great things. And he's a peach of a boy.'

'Yes, he's a peach of a boy. He will be some one some day. You like him, don't you, Thaisa?'



She turned deep eyes up to him, and in their depths he saw a returning dream as she answered, 'I just like to play with him.'

Even with that disclaimer, there came to Peter the instinct to leave, to allow something young and precious to develop undisturbed. But Thaisa, moving closer, said, shyly, 'But now I like you best of all the world, Peter.'

## 4

The weather grew warm, and at times Peter, who was working harder than ever in his life, would drop into bed, too tired to think or even feel. But when September came, with cooler days, he revived.

The boy Ian appeared many evenings, but he stayed only a short time, seeing perhaps that Thaisa and Peter knew only each other. When he had gone, the two would sit out on the steps of the little shack, very quiet. One night they sat close together and listened to Jenny within, singing as she moved about. Her voice rose on 'See the Chariot at Hand Here of Love, Wherein my Lady Rideth' — a song Richard had taught her. When she had finished, Richard's deep and moving voice came forth in Shelley's 'I Arise from Dreams of Thee.' The music drifting out into the moonlight stirred Thaisa so that she lifted her face, cleared of all confusions, to Peter.

'When Father sings, he makes me forget,' she whispered. 'Forget what?'

'Many things. . . . I was very ill in Chicago after Mother told me — a story. . . .' Her face grew white and

her hands began to tremble. He saw that she had suffered a driving shock.

He put his hand on hers, and after a time she grew calmer.

‘Father tried to interest me when I grew better and was able to just creep about. Something seemed to have died in me, Peter, when I learned how unfair life was. I thought if I could only grow hard, not care . . .’

‘But you’ll always care too much, Thaisa.’

‘Perhaps. Once I thought if only you could get away from yourself, not caring that way . . .’ An old phrase she had once used returned to her. ‘. . . a holy indifference. . . .’

‘Beautiful.’

‘Yes, but it’s hard to get that! There’d have to be a lot of living and understanding before you came to that, and I don’t mean resignation at all, Peter.’

‘Heaven forbid!’

‘An old tapestry that hung in my old home — did I ever tell you about it and how it drew me? Well, there were many figures woven in it, and all of them seemed sad and lonely, except the dancing one.’

‘Go on,’ said Peter softly.

‘I used to think strange thoughts when I looked at that tapestry, and I’ve dreamed a lot about it since I’ve grown up. There was one figure in the group, the fine self-conscious one, the one who danced and had gifts to bestow. But Peter, you can only be free when you’re alone in the woods, or walking down a quiet road.’

He understood her confusions, how she had been played upon by harsh interferences and domination.

‘I wish you could be left alone, Thaisa. Just obeying your own law, like a flower with its face to the sun. Always I see you in floating robes, dancing in a meadow.’

‘Oh, Peter, yes — I started to tell you how Father tried to interest me back there in Chicago, after I had been ill. He took me to a theatre on the North Side where he was working as manager. I don’t remember the name of the play, but there was dancing and music, and something awoke in me.

‘Afterwards I went with Father behind the scenes. I don’t mean that night, but later. And Miss Benson, the leading lady, dressed me as Juliet and let me say lines from the balcony scene. Then she called Father, and old John Lewis, the Shakespearean actor — you know him — came too. . . .’

She stopped. After a time she went on, ‘Peter, I can’t tell you how I felt! Something opened in me, warm and lovely. . . . John Lewis told Father there was material in me — that he would help me — and Father smiled.

‘When we reached home, Mother was in bed and the house was very quiet. I told Father I wanted to go on the stage, and he smiled again and said that it was the vanity in every human being that made him at some time or other in his life think he could be an actor. . . .

‘But I told him I knew this was real. And he said very well, that I should go ahead.’

Peter waited.

‘I was so happy, Peter, that I couldn’t speak. And then Father finished. He said: “But never expect to look at me or speak to me again.”’



Peter's hands clenched at the cruelty of this. 'You should have gone ahead with your own life, Thaisa,' he told her.

She turned to him. 'Peter, there was something hard and implacable in me. I meant to. Father was very good to me, and he tried to explain what being a Worthington meant. . . .' Suddenly she laughed. '. . . What being a Worthington meant! Well, there were many things he didn't know. . . .

'Being a Worthington meant little to me, that is, he didn't influence me that way. But when he appealed to my love for him and reminded me of a night we walked home in the rain — how close we were — how greatly he needed my love. . . . Oh, well, I just gave up the stage idea. . . .'

Suddenly she rose, and he with her, but it was as though she had moved quite away from him. She stood and stretched out her arms, thrusting them into a glorious, moonlit world. It seemed to Peter that she wanted to press its beauty to her breast. And he knew he wanted to press her to himself. But of this desire he dared not speak.

They walked down to the gate. 'Through all the practical living, Peter,' she told him, 'I never forgot you, and our ship days together. A mysterious, God-like Peter who in some dim and distant future was to show me all the beauties of life.'

A chill went through him. 'I did not expect you to remember, Thaisa,' he answered.

'But you did remember, Peter. . . .' Perfect trust was in her tones.

God, I wish I had never come, he thought with sudden, unaccustomed gravity. For here was something of an impos-

sible faith threatening to reach out to hold him — something that he feared, and yet that he intensely desired.

Her voice came again to him: 'Are you going to stay all winter, Peter? Oh, I hope you can.'

'No. I must be getting back to my work. Thaisa, I have very little except the dribblets coming in now and then from my articles.'

'But that doesn't matter, does it?'

'I've never thought so. Still . . .' He didn't tell her that money might make things easier for them all. He feared to say much to influence her in any way.

## 5

Thaisa began to grow restless. She would walk through the woods alone, returning impervious to all; and she would enter while dinner was being prepared and Peter and Richard were talking together. Jenny would speak sharply: 'Where've you been?'

'Walking in the woods, Mother.'

There was no disrespect in her tone, yet Jenny would fly into a rage. 'Now then, my lass, look sharp; keep a civil tongue in your head.'

There would be a quick, crimson glance at Peter — apparently interested only in Richard's talk, but really wondering whether young Ian Trevor had been walking with her.

Jenny, still in a rage would go on: 'Take off that dress and put on your gingham and an apron and help with supper.'

Returning in a few moments, clad in the washed-out ging-

ham, too short and too tight, Thaisa would go to the stove and stir some brew in a big iron pot, her eyes fixed on some distance.

‘Haven’t you a tongue in your head? You’re coming your grandmother’s tricks of showing off. And remember, I’m as good as you or her any day.’ Jenny kept her voice lowered, so Richard might not hear, yet the words went straight.

But it was no use; there was no getting at Thaisa. She shut even Peter away. Some tumult was going on underneath — that opening of her heart to him, and then this sudden closing up.

Then he saw her one day with Ian. The two figures walked close together down the road, and Thaisa’s head was bowed, listening. She was, Peter felt, being pulled between the call of her once cherished faith in some destiny, and the strength of a young and ardent love offering its beauty.

## 6

‘Thaisa, sing for us,’ Richard asked one night after supper.

‘Not tonight, Father.’

‘Don’t ask her to do anything, Richard. She’s a sullen besom.’ Jenny turned to Peter. ‘You raise them, give your heart’s blood, and this is your reward.’

Again that terrible crimson tide reaching to the grey eyes. Peter ached with misery. Strange to him to know these feelings. And he felt a resentment. Emotion was a nuisance not to be encouraged.



No, Thaisa would not sing, she would not speak a piece from Shakespeare, but after she had washed and dried the dishes, she went out doors and played hard with her brothers. Her laughter rang out gaily; she darted about like a nymph.

‘How exquisite she is,’ thought Peter, watching her, and desiring her now with a passionate earnestness. He went on thinking. ‘She’s an artist child. An artist. All this love business, this family pulling about is not for her. She has greater destiny. She should stand alone and self-justified.’

And then he went out to her, and put his hand on her shoulder. He felt a tremor shake her. She whispered, ‘Peter.’ It was as though she said, ‘It is you, Peter. . . . You!’

He felt guilty. Still hadn’t he done something for her — cleared her gropings?

## 7

One day a lady called at the shack — a Mrs. MacFarland who was aunt to Ian Trevor. She was a neighbor, and Thaisa told Peter that Richard often called on her when he wasn’t busy in the hop fields. There was music in her home, and books.

Peter, as he listened, grew interested in the caller. She was the type of woman, he saw, who stayed in her twenties as long as she possibly could — until, in fact, she was well over forty. But Peter felt that Richard found her pretty attitudinizing very attractive.

She came now to say that they were in trouble at her farm again. Chicken and egg thieves had drifted in with some

of the Mexican workers. And it was difficult to secure sufficient pickers, since all the hops — miles and miles of them — ripened at the same time. Perhaps Mr. Worthington could help her in both matters.

Jenny remained in her own small room during the visit. Thaisa, coming in from feeding the chickens, spoke nicely to Mrs. MacFarland and sat down. ‘. . . Tell your mother,’ Richard said, ‘that Mrs. MacFarland has called.’

Thaisa went away, returning in a moment. ‘Will you pardon my mother, Mrs. MacFarland?’ she said. ‘She has a headache.’

For a moment Richard looked blackly outraged, and Peter wondered at it all. Mrs. MacFarland left shortly, and Peter and Richard walked down the road with her. When Peter returned with Richard, he observed that Jenny had suddenly recovered. She stood on the steps, a pail of water in her hand. Richard stopped short at sight of her, a dark anger gathering in his face. Jenny braced herself to meet whatever was coming. Thaisa appearing from the house sensed at once the coming storm. Fear gathered in her eyes.

Peter wondered at the intensities of her emotions. But in-harmony was terrible to her. He saw her go quickly around the house before the storm broke.

He might help her. But when he reached the back of the house, she had quite disappeared. Peter felt that he had better go away — that it was all getting too much for him.

But he stayed on. The hops were baled and sold, and a short, idle time ensued. ‘Couldn’t we have a picnic in the woods today?’ he inquired of Thaisa one Monday morn-



ing. Richard and the twins had gone to call on old Benjamin, the farmer mail-carrier, who was ill.

Thaisa's face lit; beautiful, it was then, Peter thought, with all its sensitiveness revealed — a nobility too. But suddenly the veil came down, and the familiar droop saddened the young lips, for Jenny was speaking.

‘I'm sorry, Mr. Dagmar,’ — Jenny never seemed to be able to share in the familiarity of ‘Peter’ — ‘but we must wash the clothes today.’

She waited, but the retort she evidently expected did not come. Thaisa standing near, looking like a young stork in her short, gingham dress, did not speak at once. Then — ‘Shall I sort the clothes?’ she asked.

‘Are you so hardly done to? Abused, because clothes must be washed!’

‘Mother, please. I don't mind helping.’

Silence.

Peter almost ran from that silence. Peter, the immune from sympathetic emotion, felt a hot flash in his head. Why couldn't they stop hammering her? Keep hands off? ‘I'll carry her away to some mountain top and leave her to the stars,’ he thought.

A voice reached him: ‘Mr. Dagmar.’

Jenny was calling to him. He returned. ‘She'll go to the picnic; I'll fix something to eat.’

He looked at Thaisa. . . . Could any young, slight thing be so hurt and survive, he thought miserably. ‘Thank you,’ she said, ‘thank you, Peter. I don't care for a picnic today.’

Straight, tall, white, with deep eyes filled with an amaz-



ing sea of color and depth. . . . 'I'll sort the clothes,' she said and walked away.

Jenny, frightened now, looked at Peter. 'She's a hard one to understand; always has been for me, at least. She got along all right with her lady grandmother.'

'I suppose so.' She found no sympathy in his voice.

'She doesn't realize work has to be done. Still, she doesn't fuss much now, but it used to be she'd never want a sign of things that had to be done — washing, mending, cooking.'

'The mechanics of life. . . . If she could be spared . . . .'  
Peter began.

'Eh? Well, I'm sure I'm at my wit's end. If I could just whip her!'

'Oh, you couldn't do that!' He felt his hands clinch at the bare thought. What would he do if this woman should strike Thaisa?

'She'd be off like a shot if I did. But if anyone will tell me how to handle her . . . .'

'She used to worship her father.'

'Well, that seems to be gone too in a way. I've heard it's hard to handle growing girls; but I wash my hands off the whole thing.'

If you only could, thought Peter.

Jenny made the rare treat of milk toast for supper and insisted afterwards that Thaisa sit outside in the swing with Peter. Thaisa thanked her and smiled. Later, when

the small boys were in bed, the four — Richard and Jenny, Peter and Thaisa — sat out in the moonlight together. There was relaxation.

The moonlight touched Thaisa's young face to a great beauty. She was, for the moment, empty of fears. The environment being happy, she seemed to rise in it. Peter felt a pride in her, as though he had fathered her.

Richard too was at his best. Jenny sat close beside him. She did not touch him, but there was the effect of her arms about him, holding him. Peter realized suddenly that Jenny was still young and vital, more so than he remembered in the New York days. Secure in her possession — that was it.

Richard, in high humor, began to tell stories. Peter saw the light spring into Thaisa's eyes; a momentary return of that old child glorification of this father.

Jenny, stirred, stimulated, laughed out ringingly. There was a wild spirit in her. She lifted her voice. Sang:

‘ When Pat went over the mountains,  
His darlin’ for to see;  
His whistle was loud and shrill,  
His song it was to be . . .

‘ Och, Mary, the mother cried,  
Who is that whistlin’ sure?  
Och, Mother, ’tis only the wind  
A-whistlin’ through the door.’

Gaily she went on, head thrown back. Young, filled with some essence. They all sat silent as the last echo died away.

Richard told another story. Jenny followed:

‘ ’Twas in Wales, as my father told it. . . . About this same Mary perhaps — a young girl at any rate. Coming to her mother one day, telling bitter, cruel tales of gossip the neighbors were spreading about her. . . .

‘ “Well, ne’er thee mind, my lass,” said her mother. “. . . They can’t *talk* it so.”

‘ “But Mother, *they have done!* . . .” ’

Silence. Thaisa, bewildered. Richard, feeling extreme distaste. Peter, vastly amused at the subtlety in the story, but fearful of the growing black anger in Jenny’s face. ‘Now then, now then, have I ruffled the delicate Worthington spirit?’

‘I—I don’t understand the point, Mother’—from Thaisa.

‘It’s not fitting you should,’ Richard’s tone bit deep, like frost. But Jenny flamed high. ‘Ah, ’tis fine to be in the seat of the Almighty. . . .’

Richard rose in majesty, stalked into the house. And Jenny, wilted, sat on. Bitterly she turned to Thaisa: ‘You’re all as hard as nails!’ she exclaimed. And Thaisa cried, ‘Oh, Mother, I’m sorry—’

Finally, Jenny also went inside, but no voices came from within the shack. Peter felt helpless. And while he was pondering, Thaisa spoke. ‘Peter, sometimes things start out to be beautiful, but they never end in beauty.’

To this he could not reply. He could not deny the ugliness in life.

‘Only you are perfect, Peter. I am not afraid with you.’



## 9

The cloud blew over, and the next week a group of young people, friends of Ian Trevor, came visiting Mrs. MacFarland. There was much gaiety. Clear, bright nights; many insect calls; the yellow light leaping from the hop furnaces where the men opened the doors to put in wood; the sweet tinkle of guitars; the picturesque costumes of the Mexicans; a stolid Chinaman moving about softly, intent only on his work.

A board floor was put down near the hop house, and here the young folks danced. A special party was given. Thaisa, in her faded lavender gingham dress, meant to walk over after supper with Richard and Peter, but Jenny refused to go.

Immediately on the arrival of the three, Ian came forward, and with a mere nod to Peter drew Thaisa within his arms, quite as though claiming his own. Peter, a bit thrown back — for he and Thaisa had walked over hand in hand from the shack — still was able to admire the lad's straightforward way, his complete honesty.

They danced, their young bodies in perfect attune. Ian was an intense young lover — Peter saw that too — one who would proclaim his passion to the world and yet perhaps say nothing in words to Thaisa until he had the stars to offer her.

Peter wandered about. His heart felt heavy, and suddenly he realized that he was in love with Thaisa. Out in the fragrant dark, he pondered this thing life had done to

him. Because life, he thought, would have no meaning for him if Thaisa and this flaming young boy should go away together.

And then he heard a voice speaking in those soft tones so different from the harsher ones about. ' . . . Peter . . . Peter! ' and he stepped near a lantern that she might see him.

' Oh, there you are,' she cried, and slipped her hand through his arm. ' Do you know we have never danced together, Peter! '

The guitars tinkled as he held her close. How very lovely she was. And more exquisite in her faded lavender than any other though gowned in silk and pearls.

But this would not do. He must resist. . . . Start off very soon to new lands and — forget.

' How beautiful it is tonight, Peter. Is it because you are here, and being with you makes all perfect — takes away all fear? '

' Little Thaisa,' he whispered, his lips close to her hair. Some intuition warned him of what she would come to mean in his life unless now — this hour — he should fly — far away. . . .

He drew her away to a cloistered space, ringed about by trees, shut away even from Ian's young face that had glowered at them from a spot near the musicians' stand.

Simply, Thaisa lifted her face, and he kissed her — a long, warm contact in which spirit seemed to flow to spirit and flesh warm to flesh.

They separated, gazed at one another. ' . . . Thaisa . . . Thaisa! ' Peter breathed.

' Yes, I know, Peter. It has always been meant. You

knew too, and that is why you came here. You have known always, haven't you?'

Still tingling, still flying, Peter said, 'Yes, this is love. . . .'

'Love. . . . Oh, Peter, we will go away together, and never be parted.'

He drew her to him, saying: 'Thaisa, are you too young to look into your heart, deep, and know whether this is love or simply loyalty?'

'Peter!'

'I know, beloved, but we must be sure. That boy Ian is near your age. He is strong and young and eager as the wind.'

She had turned white. 'He is only my friend, while you are — Peter. . . .'

'Yes. But I know Thaisa, the little poet.'

'Poet! Because I believe our love was meant from the beginning! Haven't you thought so, too? Is that not why you have waited?'

He nodded, not meeting her eyes.

'Peter, we'll travel the world over. We'll have love, and there'll be no ugliness anywhere in our lives. Only beauty.'

'Yes.'

'I'm quite ready to go to world's end with you now.'

'I want you, Thaisa, more than I ever thought possible to want any woman. But there is much to be done. I must get busy, get a job.'

'Why?'

'A married man must be financially substantial.' And then he stopped in amazement at himself.

'Peter, couldn't I just be near you in a little studio next



to yours, and we'd meet and take our dinners together? I'd find a job and you'd find a job, and some day, when we both had money, we'd get married.'

'No!' He had suddenly grown away from her. 'Thaisa, I'm going to give you a chance before we marry.' He tried to speak lightly, but a cold wind seemed to blow upon him. Marriage! A strange, a terrible bond. '. . . And I must prepare.'

'I don't care that you are poor, Peter, if that is what you're trying to tell me.' She moved closer to him. 'How lovely it all is — how very, very lovely. You are my Prince!'

She was like a fair and fragile flower. The touch of her soft lips raised to his made him tremble. The fervor in him was reduced, and he grew afraid. Her faith in him, which had been renewed by his coming, both lifted and appalled him.

But he did not let her see this — only held her close.

## IO

A Mexican thrust an armful of wood into the hop furnace, and in its rising flames both Peter and Thaisa beheld Jenny. She had come then. But she was standing in a sort of menacing intent. Richard and Mrs. MacFarland passed near her.

Peter, afraid of he knew not what, started forward, but in a twinkling Jenny had moved, hands outstretched, to bar Richard's way. For a breath she stood, dreadfully dominant of the scene. Then: 'It ill becomes you,' she cried in a passion-filled voice that carried far into the still night, 'to

leave your wife and children at home whilst you go gallivanting. A Worthington too, full o' pride and honor!'

Richard, Peter saw, stood drooping in an exquisite humiliation. Then his gaze, fixed on Jenny, turned to a slow and incredulous horror. He said, addressing those about him, 'I am very sorry for this,' and lifted his head high. The crowd, which had paused, turned away. With a sort of apology, he left Mrs. MacFarland and went straight to Jenny.

'Come,' he said, 'you should have remained at home.'

Thaisa and Peter walked beside Richard through the divided crowd, Peter acutely aware that Richard had created belief in his wife's mental irresponsibility.

Ian came up to Thaisa. 'Don't go away, Thaisa,' he implored. 'Just dance with me as though nothing had happened. People will forget.'

Entreaty shone in his eyes, but Thaisa, in a small voice, answered, 'Thank you, Ian, but I'm going home with my father.'

In silence, the four went down the road toward home. Richard and Jenny went within the shack. Peter said, 'I'm afraid Richard will be cruel. She has hurt his most vulnerable place.'

Thaisa nodded. Her face was white.

## II

For days, Richard seemed actually not to see Jenny. And Thaisa, helping with the work, looking after the children, was almost as silent. Once Ian called, but Thaisa who went out to talk with him, returned into the house shortly.



Peter found it all extremely depressing. He went on long, lonely walks, coming back to this deadening quiet in the shack. Then Richard aroused himself one evening and brought out the chessboard.

Now, all else neglected, Peter and Richard sat at a small table near a window, their eyes fixed intently upon little wooden men. Occasionally a hand would make a stealthy move, but both were lost to any world about them.

Peter, at times, was dimly conscious that Thaisa came to stand near the table. He felt her wide, grey eyes filled with some darkening cloud, fixed upon him, pondering, half afraid. Yes, he felt that fear, that questioning. . . .

But she was a shadow. The wooden men took up all his time, his energy and his thought, as they did Richard's. Once though, the high tragedy of Jenny's face came intervening, and Peter started. Then, seeing Richard still undisturbed, his mind returned to the board.

The third day a cry came from the road — a high, wide cry — or was it laughter? Both men rushed out — the thought of fire penetrating even their mental isolation. There was nothing, only a clear road both ways. But when they returned to their place, the chessboard had disappeared. Only the bare table stood before them.

Jenny crouched in a corner, arms folded. Her eyes brooded smolderingly on Richard. With a shrug he turned away.



Peter went out. He wanted the woods. He looked off through a clear space, to where the road led away. He could very easily go down that way and so pass out of a danger to himself and to another. For to go headlong into a bonded intimacy that seemed to bring out all the ugliness of which the human heart was capable seemed a fool's blindness.

But even as he hesitated, down through that same wide and open space came Thaisa. When she saw him she stopped, and, to his pained amazement, turned and seemed herself about to fly, as once before. Then — outside of himself — he heard his voice crying her name; he felt himself, by some momentum, running to where she was vanishing from his sight. And, to the rhythm of his steps, he cried, ' . . . Let her escape — let her escape. . . . '

And: ' Let me escape — let me escape. . . . ' an answering rhythm came, but he went on until he had reached her. He put out his hand, drew her to him, and held her slight and throbbing figure tight.

' Why are you running from me, Thaisa? '

She looked at him, her face very small and very cold. ' I am afraid,' she answered. ' I am afraid. . . . '

He remained silent.

' And you have hidden yourself away from me,' she went on.

' Hidden myself? '

' Yes; bending over silly wooden men.'

This child. . . . How much she knew. . . . How little she knew.

‘Thaisa,’ he cried. ‘Thaisa!’ And buried his face in the fragrance of her white neck.

So they stood in the thick and mysterious woods, strangers to one another, life beating hard in both. Strangers and enemies. He felt this strongly.

But enemies only because they were man and woman, each seeking to hold the other — each panting for freedom? He did not know. Only that she was very dear and very desirable. ‘Darling,’ he whispered, ‘let’s hurry and be together for always.’

Perhaps she felt a new tenderness in him. She lifted her face. ‘Very well, Peter. . . .’ And then she asked: ‘Can’t people, if they take thought, escape being hurt?’

‘By taking thought? Anticipation? But how can one anticipate unless he be a prophet?’ He laughed shortly.

‘Well, then, by believing signs. . . . You have believed all these years, because of our first wonderful meeting, that we belonged.’

Again he buried his face against hers. . . .

— She said, ‘. . . Look up, Peter, while we think this out. . . . If, by some understanding, we could save ourselves. . . . If Mother could understand Father’s love of dancing on a hill top. . . .’ Always, it seemed, she came back to that picture of him on the Irish moors. ‘But she’d have to feel the winds herself!’

‘Ah, little poet. . . .’ He gazed sadly at her. ‘I should just run away from everything,’ he told her.

‘Run away!’

‘Other lands, other faces. . .’ he tried to quote, lightly. It was dreadful, this thing of the blind leading the blind.

‘I know what it is — the answer,’ she said. ‘. . . It’s that perfect truth; that complete faith I have in you, Peter. . .’

‘Is it? I don’t know. . . .’

‘I thought you could tell me everything.’ He saw in her eyes the color of her dream — a dream of a man she had conjured in her childhood. One of his clear moments came to him.

If Richard had not sent this child wandering in the hard days of adjustment in New York, she would not have turned to him — this faulty, selfish Peter Dagmar. Oh, it had been an exquisite experience, but was it out of life itself, or out of one of the blundering errors man constantly makes?

‘I know nothing myself, Thaisa,’ he told her at length, sadly.

## 13

Soon he knew he must return to Chicago, and he fixed the day. He must, however, first make a trip to Portland for a much needed valise.

‘I’ll go with you, Peter,’ Richard said.

Peter knew disappointment. He had intended to ask Thaisa to accompany him. She might still go, but what fun they could have had alone!

Richard at once sent Paul to the MacFarland place for the loan of a farm wagon. Jenny watched his every move in a sort of dumb entreaty.



Paul came back, hoisted in the farm wagon. Young Ian Trevor was driving the black horse. 'I've errands in Portland too,' he cried.

His glance rested on Thaisa who had come to the door and who suddenly, as though called, went down the path and stood against the front wheel, head uplifted, to talk to Ian. Peter watched them.

Paul set up a great cry when his father lifted him down from the wagon. He too had thought to go to Portland. Richard was always loving with his little boys, and now he bent and kissed the lad. 'Next time you'll go, Son,' he said, '— you and young Richard — and we'll have a good time seeing a circus and eating ice cream.'

But Paul ran screaming in to Jenny. Next time meant nothing to him. In his lexicon there was no future.

Jenny, the child held against her, stood in the doorway watching as the three men drove away. Her eyes were wide and hungry. Richard had uttered no word to her. Thaisa remained in the road, the blue material of her thin dress whipping around her and outlining her slender figure. Her head was lifted high and as the men turned, she stretched out her hands to them. A full gesture, graceful and giving.

Peter's eyes remained on her, but young Ian gazed straight ahead. Richard, turning suddenly, spoke. 'See Thaisa! My daughter! She looks as she looked once when she was a very little girl and danced for me. . . .' His voice went low. 'And now this life for her on a hop farm!'

His listeners answered nothing. There was something extremely moving in Richard's falling into a mood of such

sadness. And it was a mood he sustained till they reached Portland.

Peter forgot all about the new valise and went to thinking of flowers or a box of candy for Thaisa. He chose the candy as being less perishable to convey back to Ranger, but when he went into a shop, to his great confusion he could not locate his bill folder. The loose change he carried was not sufficient to pay the bill. And his negligence meant getting in earlier tomorrow to purchase his ticket and berth.

He scored his carelessness. The purse, containing practically all his money, was undoubtedly reposing on his dresser in the little room he occupied in the shack. At the last moment he had forgotten to pick it up.

He hastened to rejoin Richard at a hotel in Couch Street. Ian, he remembered, had made no engagement except to meet them to drive them back to Ranger.

But there at the hotel, awaiting him, stood both Richard and Ian. New beings they seemed, with refreshed and different interests. 'Not a word, not a word,' Richard began as though the world belonged to him. 'Let us go in to lunch.'

In the restaurant Richard took a chair that approximated the head of the table. 'I have news for you,' he announced.

Peter sat back, awaiting with curiosity Richard's tidings. The waiter's coming held everything in abeyance for a moment. Then Richard told his news.

'Did you know there's a very good stock company here in the Longwood Theatre?' he asked. 'You didn't! Well, I looked in the theatre today and met some interesting peo-



ple. I told of my work in Chicago.' He paused. 'The result is I'm going in with them as business manager and press representative.'

Peter gasped. 'And the farm?'

Richard made a large gesture. 'I bought it for such a song it's practically paid for. I'll sell it or give it away, and we'll move here to Portland. Better opportunity for schooling for the boys, too.'

He was off on his dreams again. 'There's a chance to build up a noted group of players. And times are changing; the actor is finding a place. Thaisa thought once she wanted to be an actress.'

'Why didn't she go on?' Ian asked.

'My pride, at that time. . . . But they told me she had great talent.'

'Your pride,' said Ian directly, 'probably gave her a great set-back. She might have been on the way to a large place by now.'

Richard's eyes flashed; he did not relish criticism. 'Ponder also that you might not have met her if she had gone on to wider fame.'

'That would have been my great misfortune, but I believe we should have met.'

'Intended?' Richard asked with humorous intent.

'I can believe that.'

In the afternoon they separated, to meet again at four for the return trip. Ian wanted to watch progress on a



large bridge which was being erected in the city, and Richard and Peter were to go on to the theatre.

‘Perhaps,’ said Ian as he left them, ‘I’ll be able to get over to the theatre for you; otherwise Flood Street.’ But he wasn’t able. They found him waiting at the place agreed, seated in the farm wagon, the reins hanging from his hands. His face was bright, for he was seeing into the future, building bridges and viaducts — great stone piles swung over deep waters.

The smell of the theatre had stirred Peter’s blood. He wanted to get at his play. He thought again interestedly of the plot he had evolved when he was still deep in socialism. He had told this plot about; and three or four others had had a hand in working it out. Peter, therefore, had felt if only the play succeeded in fighting its way into actual existence, it would be a social rather than an individual creation. But all that was in the past. He had other ideas now.

They drove slowly. Once Peter in a winging mood cried out: ‘Richard, I’m going to write. Different values, different art forms. Life and man’s needs; his failures, his experiments, his own nature. Most of all his visions.’

Richard flung his arm about Peter’s shoulder. ‘Yes, you have something to give.’

Ian, hunched over, guiding his horse, said nothing. Richard spoke to him: ‘We’re leaving you out of this, Ian; but you’re young and your dreams are young.’

‘I don’t know. . . .’ Ian turned his deep, calm eyes upon Richard. ‘Dreaming of stone and iron — they’re pretty old, and you feel old with them.’

The boy was surprisingly mature. Mature, with youth

still in him. Again the feeling of two young spirits mixing came to Peter, but he put the picture behind him.

Daylight was fading when they drove up before the shack. Ian, saying that he was late as it was, did not stop, but went steadily on toward the MacFarland farm.

Thaisa came to the door. 'Oh, did Ian go on?' she cried. 'We meant to ask him to stay to supper.'

She had changed from the morning dress to a soft, white affair with tiny lace ruffles, something Peter had not seen before. Old — true — but bewitching on Thaisa. Her dark hair had escaped from pins and hung about her brow in little curls. Peter wanted at once to take her into his arms.

Jenny, in the blue cambric she affected, looked up questioningly. Only at Richard; no one else mattered. She waited while the twins greeted their father with shouts and while he for a moment wrestled with them — waited, as though ready to shield herself from his biting coldness. But instead his voice rang out: 'What do you say to moving to Portland? What say, Jenny?'

Jenny stood, the color flying her cheek. For days he had addressed no word to her; now this pleasant opening. 'To Portland?' she cried.

Joyously he answered, for Richard's face was already turned to new worlds: 'Yes; we'll get rid of this place and go to live in Portland. I've got a job in the theatre.'

Jenny said, 'I'd like that.'

Richard was going on: 'And Thaisa, if she still wants the chance, can go into the theatre.'

Thaisa's eyes grew starry. 'Perhaps,' Richard said, 'you will be one of the leading actresses of the country.'



Her hand went to her heart. 'Oh, Father, *Father*,' she cried, 'you won't keep me back now?' She drew in a deep breath and looked off into some ecstatic future. Then returning, her eyes met Peter. 'But you see, Father, I'm going to marry Peter.'

## 15

A silence; then young Richard cried out: 'I'm hungry, Mother,' and pulled a chair toward the set table. This awakened Peter, who had been thinking of destiny changed or altered and of resultant chaos, conflicts. But it was all too abstruse for human calculation. He said: 'I meant to say something to you, Richard — naturally — before I left.'

Richard answered slowly, 'I like you, Peter — you know that — but in a measure I'm sorry. Marriage ties one up so, and I should have liked Thaisa to have her chance first in the world.'

Why didn't you give it to her then when she asked for it? Peter's eyes asked, but his lips were silent.

Richard waved them all to the table, his grey mood put aside. Jenny, red spots now in her cheeks, moved from stove to table happily. Young Richard and Paul, rising in the atmosphere, acted in a manner that at any other time would have called Jenny's wrath down upon them, but now they went unreprieved.

After supper, Richard's good spirits continued. The little boys were put to bed protesting, the dishes cleared away. Richard, with Jenny beside him, went outdoors. The night



was cool, but their two chairs were drawn close together; their voices were soon raised in old-time song.

Peter said to Thaisa, 'Come,' and silently they went out, down the moonlit road that led like a white promise on to larger places.

They went quietly. Once when Thaisa raised her face up to his, Peter cried out: 'How you change, Thaisa! Just now you are like Raphael's picture of a Boy!'

She smiled happily.

'Thaisa, are you very sure about yourself — and me?'

'Very, very sure, Peter. Especially now since you've come back to me.'

With the harmony now come into the small home, she had been liberated. Her fear of life and of the future seemed gone. For now all was perfect.

In Thaisa this desire for perfection was romanticism, he knew. The other sane and balanced part of her was helpless against the depth of her longing for beauty. And no cynicism of circumstances could make her demand less insistent. Pushed back, laughed at, deplored as useless baggage, because it never could be satisfied, still the desire would be there while Thaisa lived. Not all the pitiable little ruins — when beauty about to be reached was snatched away from her — could kill this deepest part.

And was it not just as he had thought before, that, at a critical period in her life, this belief and faith in a beauty to be found, had come to focus on him? An unreal thing. At least, something not to be taken advantage of now in her mature years.

Again that desire to go — and so leave her to another fate.

Her voice came to him. 'Why don't you answer me?' Thaisa laughed.

'Such a brute! Actually, I didn't hear.'

'Just a trite thing I said; was there ever such a pair of lovers? To meet as we did — you just dropped from the sky to comfort a crying child — and then to believe that forever we should belong.' She raised his hand to her face. 'Like a fairy tale, Peter. I wish I were more beautiful.'

'You have beauty enough, my dear. Why should you wish for more?'

'Oh, I don't know, Peter. I want everything for you.'

'Thaisa, what of Ian?'

'Just a playmate, Peter. . . . How could he be otherwise now that I know that your love was predestined?'

He spoke quickly: 'It isn't fair, I tell you. God knows what I've deprived you of. . . . It was too much for mere man to believe — the miracle of such a faith.'

She turned startled eyes to his, but eyes that still were clear. 'But you see you did believe, else you wouldn't have come for me. Peter, I don't want to hurt you, but I had started forgetting when you came back.'

'Thaisa, you must be very sure.'

'I am very sure. And it is my crown that you have always remembered.'

'Shall we go back?' he asked.

'Oh, your voice sounds tired, Peter. Of course we'll go back.'

At the broken gate before the shack, they paused. She looked up at him. 'It won't be long before we'll be together, will it, Peter?'

‘You’ll be lonely? But,’ teasingly he said, ‘you’ll have young Ian to play with.’

‘No, he’s going away too; I shan’t see him till he comes back this fall. . . . Maybe I shan’t see him then, Peter?’

‘I hope not. We’ll be together in Chicago as soon as ever I can arrange things there.’

‘And if you can’t come back here, and should send for me, I will come if from the end of the world to you.’

‘Romantic small girl. . . .’

She put her lips against his, and though he was deeply stirred, he kissed her with a tenderness that held no passion.

‘Good night, Peter.’

‘Good night, my darling.’

## 16

While he was still out there alone, looking into the quiet night, he heard Jenny’s voice from within talking to Thaisa, and apprehension shook him. He realized the murmur had been going on for some time.

‘You mustn’t expect everything of a man, my girl. When your Peter said at supper you were to be married . . .’

‘I told, Mother,’ Thaisa said proudly.

‘. . . Whoever told, I knew you’d got to be warned. It’s your way always to look for everything perfect.’

Dead silence — with Peter’s fists clenching in the dark.

‘But it’s not in the making of a man to stay faithful and straight, and I’d like you to know that, to save yourself from further heartache. He’ll expect it of you — your Peter man



— but you'll take what you can get of him, a tarnished thing at best. Now then, don't go to stone.'

A cry breaking through the stone: 'Oh, Mother, you're spoiling something beautiful!'

That cry penetrated Peter's heart. He went within, and in the larger room saw Thaisa and Jenny standing, Jenny bridling, Thaisa pale as death.

'Anything wrong?' Peter asked, looking at Jenny.

'Thaisa came in a while ago looking as if she'd seen into the Gates of Heaven,' Jenny rushed in. 'I thought then I must do a mother's duty to her daughter. . . .'

Poor Jenny! He saw she was quite in earnest. 'Her father'd never take it on himself, so I must. It's a critical period, isn't it, when a girl's to get married?'

And as no one answered, she went on: 'I thought I'd shield her from the hurts a man's bound to give a woman. I tell her to remember her lady grandmother and what a life she made for herself and for her man too, expecting the highest. Then there's her own father; she's seen the tears I've shed. I've put it all before her — that it's best she know beforehand — and there she stands frozen.'

Exhausted, having got in farther than she intended, Jenny paused.

Thaisa turned to Peter, conflict in her young face. He said, 'Thaisa, I love you, but love can hurt, as your mother says. I believe that's all she intends to say.'

Jenny cast him a look that he could not understand, but again she turned to Thaisa: 'Aye, he'll go off adventuring time and time again. . . . It's the way he's made, my lass, and then for you will be an icy silence like your grand-

mother or, like me, fight to hold, fight and fight — but adventuring he'll go!'

'No,' said Peter, 'no.'

Silence. Then Jenny spoke again: 'Everybody's human, and your Peter no less so than any other. Remember the Saturdays he kept you waiting in New York and sent you no message.'

'Don't you want Thaisa to marry me?' Peter asked. 'Are you trying to separate us?'

'No, no, I think it'll be a good thing for her to marry; she's too restless — always on the seek. But I want to harden her, so she won't feel the blows.'

Thaisa again crying out: '*Leave me alone!*'

'I'll do that,' said Jenny with dignity, and turned. As she neared Peter, she put out her hand. 'Here,' she said, 'here is your purse that you left,' and as she gave it to him, the significant look came again into her eyes.

Glancing down at the purse, he saw. . . . A woman's picture was in the inside flap, a faded likeness with the inscription, 'To Peter and our eternal love.' So familiar an object this, that for long it had ceased to register its presence upon his mind.

But Jenny, though hiding this evidence from Thaisa, had drawn her own somewhat unjust conclusions. Hastily, he put the purse in his pocket.

Jenny left. They were alone. Peter ached to say: 'Come away with me now. . . .' But he made the first sacrifice in his life.

'Thaisa,' he began gently, taking her cold hand in his, '. . . Thaisa, I'm sorry.'



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She looked up at him. 'Nothing can shake my faith in you, Peter,' she said. 'You know that.'

'I know that,' gently. 'But, dear, I am going to leave you quite alone; go away and not even write.'

'No — no!'

'Yes; I want you to go entirely uninfluenced — to have time to look into your own heart, to get a security. At the end of a few months you will write to me, or I will write to you. And you will be perfectly frank with me!'

'Is that the best way, Peter?'

'That is the best way, my beloved.'

He saw that she was nervously exhausted, so he kissed her gently: 'Good night, dear; I'll be gone tomorrow before you wake. But let us believe our future rests with some benevolent god.'

17

He had left her to herself. Her life should be clear and straight ahead now. He had done the right, the only thing, and yet as he sat in the train, speeding toward Chicago, he felt sore and aching.

Darling Thaisa, with the grey eyes upturned so confidently to his! He put the vision aside to still the pain within.

Still the intolerable ache endured as he left the train to go at once to his studio on the North Side. He opened the door. Dust was thick everywhere, and on the floor there lay three five days' notices.

He went at once to the agent and paid part of his rent, thus depleting himself. . . . Afterwards, he paid a visit to the

Art Magazine on Michigan Avenue and suggested an article on 'Art as a Liberator.' He secured the order, finished the paper in time, and had some money left to go on with. At once, he settled to writing on the play that had been in the back of his mind. For a month he gave himself up to his creation.

Then suddenly he was finished, and the play—a poor thing—pigeonholed. For all the time that he had been working, the hunger had been making itself felt. A hunger for Thaisa.

This hunger would lessen, he knew. He determined to find a hard job and let the fever abate.

He ran down Foster, who was about to start a trade journal, *Illumination*. Foster was a millionaire, restless and with ideals beyond his practical handling. Peter at once asked for a sub-editorship of the magazine.

Foster agreed: 'But you mustn't chuck it when it 'bores' you. I've heard you talk before.'

'I'll stick,' Peter promised.

They went into business then. Foster had rented offices in the Monadnock Building. It was agreed that much of Peter's writing could be done at home; but if he were really to earn his first seventy-five dollars a month, he would have to spend some hours every week going after advertising. Foster, who had inherited his wealth, had a clever money sense.

'I never sold anything in my life,' said Peter.

'Sooner you try the better, and the commission will be liberal.'

Peter gave himself six months for this experiment, and he stuck to it determinedly. There was, he found, little time

for play. Foster, having started the experiment, would soon tire, but he wanted the journal to pay.

Peter spent hours in the Crerar Library, following the history of light for the world, and after doing this, he had to work over his notes into easy readable articles, so that electric light fixture merchants should take to them as to a dime novel. This was Foster's injunction.

Then Peter spent hours chasing down fixture people, fancy candle houses, even electric stove concerns. Foster, before the interest quite left him, elucidated that the promising feature of a magazine like *Illumination* was that there were so many side lines, so many to be interested in buying advertising.

'What the devil am I working this way for?' Peter asked himself one day. 'Just to forget?' He was walking down Wabash Avenue, and a sudden idea for a new play struck him, sweeping all before it, till he came back to earth and realized he was on the way to an interview with a large firm that manufactured 'religious' candles. '. . . Yes, what the devil am I doing this for?' he asked himself again and saw a sign that read: '*Let Hartman feather your nest!*'

He grinned, but there was a twist at his heart.

18

One night he took Myra Kenyon to the Radical Club to a dance. Myra was a gay sort, pliable and moody. She was the studio type, always to be found at one party or another — never seeming to require sleep.

Peter asked her to this affair because she fitted in with his

present way of living. Apparently she asked nothing, and he had nothing to give. But she opened fire on him at once.

‘Peter, you’re a stick lately,’ she told him when they were in the crowded hall with its flaming gas jets along the walls, its uneven, shining dance floor.

‘Oh, come on, that’s not true. I’m a hard worker, that’s all.’

‘No, you’ve lost your spark. You’re getting to be as average as a ribbon selling clerk — just as standardized. You might almost be thinking of settling down!’

‘That would be terrible, wouldn’t it? . . . Well, let’s dance.’

They danced, stopped, looked about. Over near the wall, talking to one of Chicago’s woman writers, was a man with a long, black beard. He was orating; Christ had been born in him again and he had a message. . . . Laughter greeted him, and with much dignity he arose and walked toward the door. Larkin, the socialist, spoke to him as he passed out. Larkin was more courteous to this man than to any of the newspaper crowd who came here to dance.

A lull in the music. Peter left Myra and went downstairs to the saloon. Men were crowded about the bar. Women shortly would be there too, edging about the foot rail and thinking themselves very modern and wicked.

Peter took a drink and returned upstairs. Myra, coming to him directly, informed him that a man named See who came from England was about to talk. ‘He’s a whiz,’ she finished, having picked up that information. Peter listened, his arm about her. She stood very close, so that her head rested against his shoulder.

Suddenly, while the dignified chap on the platform talked, Peter saw a picture. Thaisa dancing with the young lad Ian. Two perfect bodies, beautiful and complementary.

A pang shook him. Unceremoniously he moved Myra from him. She swayed a little and cast at him a strange, intense look, beyond his understanding—a look that surprised him by its suggestion of undercurrents.

He took a long walk.

19

But as the months went on, the image of Thaisa began to grow less poignant. There were many interesting things to do, and he found it rather fun to write silly, educational articles for the trade journal. He grew not to mind very much bearding men in their offices and selling advertising to them.

Then there were the studio parties—and girls, always new girls, with their airs and their graces and their little gestures toward a larger freedom that they could not name.

Life, then, was going on very equably. Far lands began to beckon again; he felt the desire to wander. He thrilled to the thought of long rides on the sea, climbs over mountains, weeks spent in quaint villages. . . .

He began to make his preparations. Then, returning one evening to his studio, he found a letter slipped under his door. The envelope was postmarked Portland. From Thaisa at last!

He sat for a long time before opening the envelope. Paradoxical emotions beat within him. He looked at the long

black valise awaiting his packing for his new flight. . . . And he thought of Thaisa and her loveliness. . . . Man's eternal conflict, he thought. . . .

At length, he opened the letter. It was written by Jenny. She began:

Dear Mr. Dagmar: I remembered your address, because once you told it to Richard, and I overheard. I'm writing now to tell you about Thaisa. Of course she doesn't know about this and I trust you never to tell her. I must say I'm sorry I talked to her about things as I did when you were here that last night; she seemed very unhappy for days. I thought if she knew what a woman mostly has to face, things wouldn't come so hard on her afterwards. I see now I should have known better.

I never told her about the picture, and I suppose she still believes you a saint and that your love story was meant and things like that. We moved to Portland. But some way or other, she doesn't seem to be herself. Looks strange and puzzled, like she was lost on a desert island. We rented the farm and moved here. I talk and talk to her, but she doesn't answer, only runs away from my voice. I've grown nervous she may just fade away. The truth is, she's still honing after you, and I'm pocketing a mother's pride to write this to you. I think if you should get together again everything would be all right. Richard is blaming me as usual.

Yours truly,

Jenny Worthington.

1048 Euclid Avenue.

Peter sat on, the letter in his hand. ‘. . . Talk and talk to her.’ . . . Yes, Jenny would do that. He had gone away, thinking to leave Thaisa alone, to herself. But she was not being left alone, not while Jenny lived.

A great, protective emotion filled his heart. On the crest of this, he went to his desk and wrote a letter which read:

Dearest Thaisa: You have never written to me, so now I am writing. I want you, beloved. Thaisa, will you marry me at once? And if you can find it in your heart to grant me this gift, could you come here? At present, it is impossible for me to leave Chicago. I love you, Thaisa. I need you.

Peter.

So he called to her in such a way that her spirit would be healed, and her faith rise and shine, justified in itself.

Then he rose, lifted the black bag from the couch and put it away on the high shelf of his cupboard.

20

‘Is that a letter from Peter Dagmar?’ Jenny asked; and Thaisa perforce answered ‘Yes.’

‘What is it he says?’ She put out her hand, while Thaisa stood, brows knit. . . . Jenny calmly read the letter not intended for her eyes.

‘Well, he’s keeping the vow you told me about. . . . I call that romantic. . . .’

So Jenny, as always, went on and on. But she had started something she must finish: writing that letter to Peter — withholding many things — and Peter’s answer. Perhaps

she had been too impulsive, but Thaisa in her quiet ways had irritated her beyond words. And frightened her. And Richard had said hard words of blame to Jenny. . . . Best if Thaisa went away.

‘You’re going, aren’t you?’

Thaisa did not answer.

‘You know you can’t just go wandering all over the countryside with that young Ian Trevor.’

Memories of hill tops, glowing sunsets, returned to the girl. Perfection, with Ian’s young idealism matching her own. Not love-making as she knew love-making through Peter, but a meeting of dreams. . . . To think it all out, to get things in perspective. If Jenny would only stop talking! . . .

‘You’ve wanted Peter Dagmar all your life; you’ve dreamed of him, thought you were made for one another. Now the way’s made clear, and you don’t seem eager any more.’

‘Mother, let me think.’

‘And where does that get you? Let you go mooning around you mean, driving a body crazy. And as for Ian Trevor — tell me, are you in love with *him* now?’

‘If I could go out into the woods and get clear thoughts!’

‘Speaking in poetry, like your father and your lady grandmother! Nay, my girl, face life. Ian Trevor is yet to do his building. That’s why he doesn’t want to tie himself down. And his aunt told some one, and I heard of it — it’ll be many years before he will be able to tie himself down.’

‘Why are you so anxious to have me go away?’

Clever Jenny shrugged her shoulder. ‘Anxious! Do as

you please. It's the wild longing in you I feel. It's that the love of this man, calling to you, will still your wildness and your strange ways that I can't cope with and that your father blames on me.'

'I'm sorry. . . .'

'There's another word — Richard used it the other day — fulfillment. It's fulfillment you're craving, and when you go and marry, as Peter Dagmar asks you, it'll be wonderful and beautiful. Meeting him in the little park as you did, as though it was meant. . . .' Thus Jenny cannily fanned into life again the dying spark of a child adoration, cannily revived the waning faith in a love ordained. 'Wonderful and beautiful and meant, as you well know,' she finished.

At last Thaisa spoke: 'You must be right, Mother.' And then softly: 'Peter knows. And out of his love and longing, he has sent for me.'

'That's right,' said Jenny, not meeting Thaisa's wide eyes. 'Now we'll go ahead and get you ready.'

PART FOUR

I

ON the fifteenth of May, Peter went to meet Thaisa in answer to her telegram giving the hour she would arrive in Chicago at the Union Depot. Never, he thought, had he been so nervous. The marriage license was in his pocket; it felt heavy as lead.

Even though it was May, a biting wind was abroad, and Peter hoped Thaisa would be adequately dressed. Already he was getting domesticated, he told himself. When her train was announced, he went with an unsteadily beating heart out to the wide platform.

Thaisa alighted. He saw her down the steps and noticed with relief that she was wearing a long coat which was warm and comfortable. As she walked through the turnstile, he went breathless. How young she seemed, how immature! But in her eyes, as they came to rest on his, lay the old perfect faith.

She put her hands in his. 'You called me, Peter,' she began, 'and I came.'

'Yes, I wanted you, Thaisa.'

He took her bag, and they walked the length of the station. 'How did you know our address in Portland, Peter? Did Father write to you?'

He nodded. He might as well implicate Richard; better than saying anything of Jenny. Thaisa must never suspect that Jenny had a hand in this meeting, this coming mar-

riage. He knew Thaisa's pride. If she knew — barely suspected — she would turn from him this moment and return to Portland.

He led the way to the little station restaurant. Holding her arm against his, he said, 'We'll be married after lunch, darling, and then, what do you say to a little trip? It can't be much — perhaps to Milwaukee.'

She stood perfectly still, light filling her face. 'Oh, that will be heavenly, Peter. But don't you think I ought to have a new dress first. Father gave me ten dollars.'

'I'll buy your dress,' said Peter in solemn tones.

Thaisa, it proved, was not very hungry. But Peter insisted on something, if only coffee and toast. 'Could we be married in church, Peter?' she asked. 'And shall we buy the dress before or after?'

'We can be married in church, and we'll buy the dress afterwards. I want to marry you as you are now.' He intended to say 'as you came to me' but something humorous put down this hoary sentimentality.

'Peter, I should like to be married in the old church on Michigan Avenue. Do you think it will be possible?'

'Anything can be made possible for you, Thaisa.' He was indeed filled with an amazing tenderness for this young girl in the too tight coat and crushed felt hat.

They went to Peacock's and bought a narrow wedding ring, plain like gold satin, and then, taking an Indiana Avenue car, they rode to the church Thaisa had once attended. There they were married by a minister, new since Thaisa's time. They stood before the altar and exchanged their vows in a very big, empty church, and when they were finished the

minister congratulated them, and they walked out into the light again.

They gazed now into a day upon which the sun shone softly. Michigan Avenue was lovely with its great stone houses and broad paths. 'Now,' said Peter, trying to speak gaily, though he felt very serious, 'we'll outfit you.'

'Husbands are supposed to do that, aren't they?' Thaisa asked, and then Peter laughed.

'Yes, those few words spoken by that long-faced man make it perfectly moral for me to buy your clothes.'

'But marriage means a great deal more.' Thaisa spoke anxiously. 'That is, if you go at it right.'

'Now Thaisa, please, don't start in by intending to make me a good wife.'

'I won't, Peter.'

Somewhat startled at that, he turned to look at her. They had taken a car back to the Loop, and Thaisa sat very small and wan-looking in her tight coat and funny hat.

'But don't make me a bad wife.' He spoke lightly, but it was all strange and rather frightening. . . . Bound to one another for life!

'Not that either, Peter.' And then she paused and suddenly lifted her grey-black eyes to his. 'What's the use of saying one thing and meaning another? I think you're afraid of my being romantic.'

The first smile he had seen since her arrival touched her lips. It would be the devil, he thought, if she hadn't a sense of humor; and stopped, appalled at really how little he knew her.

But after a time, she was able to tell him why she had been so serious. 'Peter, your letter came when I was all at sea. . . .' She paused, as though contemplating further confidence; then stopped, and a great fear touched him. He cried: 'But Thaisa, you came only because you love me? . . .' And while he awaited her answer he wondered if he should have looked into Jenny's letter more. He knew she always had motives — kept hidden.

Thaisa said: 'Your letter showed me my love.' She did not add that Jenny had cleared the way.

2

They went into one of the big shops and bought a blue dress cunningly touched with mandarin red that quite transformed Thaisa. Peter saw she was a beauty. He thought her taste excellent for one who had been buried in the country for any number of years.

Afterwards they went directly to his studio, for Thaisa admitted she was a little tired. 'An amazing day,' he said. 'No wonder you're let down.'

At the door of the studio, Thaisa paused and looked up at Peter. 'It is beautiful — and it's you.'

'I hadn't thought it beautiful,' he returned, and began all at once to wonder about practicalities. There was the sanitary couch that opened wide, but the springs were not very resilient; two arm-chairs, his desk near the window, and a worn carpet that had once matched the madras curtains in rose color. Now it had faded into two different hues, and the contrast, he thought all at once, was not

harmonious. The kitchenette was divided from the studio proper by a portière that hung limply.

But from the balcony, over the kitchenette, there hung Peter's most prideful possession, a prayer rug of wistful colors, soft as velvet.

He hoped Thaisa would notice this beauty before examining the kitchen utensils. And had he washed his breakfast dishes that morning?

Thaisa did go straight to the rug and stood entranced before its beauty. 'Peter,' she said at last, 'this reminds me of the tapestry in Manchester — with the boy who danced. Peter, I love it.'

He was pleased, but he replied only: 'I'm glad you like it, Thaisa, its yours now, you know.'

They went into the kitchen. The dishes were there, unwashed, but Thaisa did not notice. She turned on the tap above the small porcelain sink, and he remembered how she had been compelled to draw from a well all the water used by the family in Ranger. 'I've just got used to running water in Portland,' she remarked.

They returned to the studio. 'I've only kissed my wife once,' he said and drew her to him. Suddenly, on a serious note, he held her off — looked at her. 'Thaisa,' he cried, 'we've come to the real thing. . . .'

'Yes, Peter.' She was very grave but she was happy too. Free as never before — and strong. She would like Ian to know of this escapement that had come to her. Ian! A swift, sudden-springing wind passed over her; a voice seemed to call.

Then she remembered that she was Peter's wife and that

he loved her and would show her the way. And life stretched rosily before her. . . .

3

Thaisa woke Peter the next morning. She was like a happy child who has achieved. 'Peter, Peter,' she cried, 'wake up. 'Do you smell the coffee?'

He awakened — slowly at first — then with a start. There she stood before him, clad in a pink dress, and a white apron. He remembered now that she had bought these things yesterday. It seemed a strange, too domestic outfit in this place. Then his eyes traveled to her face, and he did not see domesticity written there — only a shining love. He jumped up. 'Oh, Thaisa, darling, don't spoil me,' he cried.

'I didn't get up early and make your breakfast to spoil you, Peter,' she said very slowly. 'Do you know why?'

He remained silent.

'Because I love you.'

'Beloved! . . .' he answered.

They kissed, an ecstasy upon them. . . . After a time she ran away from him into the kitchen, and soon he followed. It looked to him like a new place. The shelves held newspapers cut in a fringe, and the small two-hole gas stove had been polished till it shone. 'You see, Peter,' she said slowly, 'whatever else you need, right now you need a good housekeeper.'

She filled him with new surprises. Housekeeper indeed, with her grey eyes quite black now and that drifting bit of

color in her cheek. First of all, he thought her histrionic; he felt he wanted to think of her as that last of all, too.

Their breakfast eaten, Peter suggested that the dishes be left till they returned from their honeymoon trip to Milwaukee, but this Thaisa would not have. 'They are ours,' she said. 'I don't mind doing them.'

So Peter helped clear up. 'We'll eat our meals out for a while, Thaisa. You know I have a regular job.'

'Let's eat at home till *I* get a job,' she answered.

He paused on that thought. 'Why, I didn't intend you should get a job, Thaisa.'

'But what could I do here alone all day, Peter?'

'That's true; let's move then. I don't want you to get a job, ever.'

Thaisa laughed. Peter loved that tinkling sound. 'You're as old fashioned, really, as Father is.'

For the first time since her arrival, Peter remembered her background. 'I didn't realize you'd made a clean cut, Thaisa.'

'Father wouldn't have cared so if you had come for me, Peter. The other way hurt his pride. But Mother was all right; she gave me my carfare. And at the last, Father gave me that ten dollars.'

'Thaisa, I did not want to get into life again there in Portland. I wanted us to start clear and unconfused, alone.'

She nodded. 'I quite understand, Peter. And when you called, I came. You see what little pride I have.'

'You are all pride.' He regarded her seriously. How filled with surprises this girl was. Why had he not seen deeper into her when he was in Ranger?

‘Let’s start early on our honeymoon. And Thaisa, we’ll stay over night at the Plankington Hotel.’

She clasped her hands against her breast, a way she had when stirred. ‘Oh, Peter, how very wonderful! And I can take my best nightdress along.’

She went at once to her bag and withdrew a sheer white garment, beautifully embroidered. ‘I did this myself during that first long winter in Ranger,’ she told him. And he remembered the utility seam of Aunt Sarah’s régime. Something beautiful when finished. Strange these memories should come back now. She had woven herself deeper into his life than he had realized.

4

Thaisa talked, and for the first time he had a glimpse into her real self. Removed out of Jenny’s dominant reach, she was a different person. Intelligent — and her mind ranged far; independent it was, and given to quick observations.

A great pride filled him.

In Milwaukee they went at once to the Plankington Hotel where Peter engaged a room. ‘If we could hear music,’ Thaisa said, ‘after we’ve had dinner, it would all be perfect.’

‘We’ll see to that,’ he said. He was filled with a desire to give her anything she might ask. He went so far as to desire to protect her from all outside harshness — from the very world, in truth. He told her so.

She leaned closer to him, and he marveled at himself — at his complacency in her acceptance of him as leader, and in this acceptance, the chain that would bind him for always.

He, who had preached so long and had certainly practiced the way of freedom!

‘Our love was meant,’ she whispered, and he looked down in astonishment that the words could contain so deep a passion, ‘. . . meant from the beginning — though I will admit, Peter, that for a time, after you left Ranger, I got to believing less in its destiny.’

Hurt, as though something subconsciously treasured had been touched, he said, ‘Thaisa, what did you do after I left Ranger?’

‘I was terribly lonely. Then Ian came back, and we played ball and walked in the woods. We talked of many things. . . .’

‘Did he make love to you, Thaisa? . . .’

‘No,’ she stopped in thought. ‘No — he didn’t. I’m sure he didn’t,’ she added, in such hesitant manner that he got a frightful shock of understanding. He knew Ian’s caliber well enough to realize that the boy would not say anything definite until he could lay the gifts of the world at Thaisa’s feet. He would believe that Thaisa would feel a bond as did he — unspoken, but some day to be ratified.

And Thaisa, holding Peter in her life, would not get significances, would not see clearly. . . .

He trembled.

But now her hand stole into his, calming him, and her voice was whispering, ‘I love you, Peter.’

5

They tramped over Milwaukee, boarded trolley cars, alighted, walked by the lake. The day was windy and cold; but of this they took no thought. Their happiness was too deep for any marring. In the evening, after dinner, they went to hear music as Thaisa had wanted — an orchestra in Forham's Hall conducted by an eccentric Italian leader.

High up in a box, hands clasped tight, her head very close to his shoulder, they sat listening. Neither knew whether the music was good or bad; they knew only that they were together.

And yet he was not so entranced as to be without analysis. He had never, he knew, felt this way with any other woman, and he had believed at times that he cared very deeply. . . . What was this about marriage — this spiritual bond — that gave a different feeling?

It meant something — a very great deal. All the talking about it, all the looking at it from without its portals, told one nothing. He could not have believed that a few words spoken by a portly man, with a face that suggested a gentle lamb, could have made this difference.

Naturally the words didn't matter; it was a thread running deep — a cord that made a bond from which one could not easily turn aside. And if one did, for any reason, the bond still existed. For always, Peter felt, he must be married.

He aroused himself from this sentimental mood and found his wife sitting there beside him, as always she would be

close beside him. I can't help it, he groaned. I want her there always.

In their room at the hotel, Thaisa unpacked her bag. On top lay the filmy gown. She held it against her and then suddenly turned to Peter, who was sitting on the bed, smoking a cigarette.

'Peter,' she said, 'would you like me to do a little of Juliet for you?'

'Do — Juliet?'

She came to sit by him. 'Yes, I should love to — just for you, Peter.'

'Please then.'

She removed her dress. Above her white undergarments she slipped the loose gown; she took down her hair, braided it quickly so that it fell in long ropes on either side of her face, and turned to Peter. Miraculous! She was no longer Thaisa, but Juliet.

Exquisite, her face lifted, her eyes deep in dreams. She began to speak in golden tones. . . .

'Romeo, O Romeo. . . .'

Perfect. Gifted she was, richly so. He wanted to take her in his arms, hold all her sweetness to his breast. But he desisted. And he thought, 'No matter what, she must have her chance. I must never stand in the way.'

And he fell asleep that night, musing on ways and means of sending her to dramatic school, which meant eventually that she would go out into the world — away from him.

6

Peter reluctantly returned to work the next day, leaving Thaisa alone. But through all his activities, he was conscious of her, back there in his studio, a possession at once lovely and beyond price.

The mood persisted as the days went. Once in the glow of it, he wrote to Richard and told him something of his feelings. He appealed to Richard's romantic spirit by confessing how deep his need had suddenly grown for Thaisa, and how he had sent for her out of this need. It had not occurred to him to answer Jenny's letter.

Really, it was no business of Richard's what Thaisa did. Still, she was his daughter. And suddenly the sweat broke out on Peter's forehead. Children!

Marriage and children. There was Thaisa in his home back there over the river, wearing her little house dress and ruffled aprons, clearing up the breakfast dishes, and in a little while perhaps there would be Thaisa holding his child.

He sheered away from the purely romantic, but a man's own child seemed to him the very essence of romance. And what a welding of this thing termed marriage!

7

After greeting Foster, that first day, and telling him the great news, Peter settled to work on an article for the magazine. He worked feverishly all day, not only writing but making half a dozen calls regarding advertisements.

And underneath, he craved only to return to Thaisa for some reassurance that she had not fled from him.

At six, he was back at the studio. Thaisa opened the door to him, held up her face and kissed him. 'Oh, how terribly long you've been away!' she cried. And he smiled.

She was there — Thaisa, the beloved, grown suddenly to be the eternal one.

They ate dinner together at the little kitchen table, a feast of creamed chicken and watercress salad with good coffee. 'You are more gifted than I thought, Thaisa,' he told her. Seeing her shining eyes, he could scarcely believe she was that girl in Ranger who had gone so distraught, running the scale from high mood down to blackest depression.

Wifhood had brought her into the right atmosphere for flowering. How magnificent! Then he caught himself. 'I must take marriage more naturally,' he thought, 'just as Thaisa is taking it.'

After dinner they went out, just to walk. Every act, formerly a commonplace, was now touched with magic. He held her arm and they walked toward the lake. They spoke little, but occasionally she would draw close to him and look up into his face, her eyes deepening.

And each time she did so, an emotion shook him and he held her closer to his side.

They stopped in a drug store for hot chocolate. 'I could just as well have made this at home,' she said. 'I bought cocoa today.'

In utter consternation, his lips fell open. 'Thaisa, of course you had to buy things, and I didn't give you any

money.' All at once he felt humble. Would he go through life being such a fool?

She took the sting out. 'Will you give me some now, Peter, or when we get home? I kept an account of what I paid out.'

'When we get home.'

In the studio he emptied his pockets. 'Not much; my earnings aren't large, and I'm not practical.'

'Peter, I hate to think of you in a job! You should write as the spirit moves you; be free.'

'I have a wife now.'

'Not a burden though. I want life to go on for you just as always.'

Then in her funny little way she came to the practical. 'If you don't mind, I want to study out a paper pattern. Dresses are so expensive ready made, and I shall need more than one.'

He nodded and went to reading. After a time, he looked up from his book. She was kneeling on the floor with numerous tissue-paper puzzles spread all about her. Her brows were knit in concentration. He thought of her last night in the room of the hotel and her glowing Juliet.

Marvelous creature, a wife.

Every night for a week, Peter returned to Thaisa and her paper patterns. After supper, she would ask him what he thought this notch meant or that symbol. And he would

put his pipe aside, get down on the floor beside her and try to help straighten the maze.

And then all at once she blossomed out in her tissue-paper finery. Not really tissue-paper, but lovely things springing from those notches and triangles carefully matched together.

Thaisa explained that these delicate morsels were her summer dresses. 'But wherever did you learn to sew?' Peter asked.

'I never learned except on long seams. But this is art, like the embroidery. I'm sorry our sewing time is over.'

'*Our* sewing!'

She was sitting near him on the couch. Now she laughed. 'Have I insulted my husband? But wasn't it beautiful our being together that way?'

'No matter what the job, a community of interest?'

'I suppose that's what I mean.' She paused. 'And I'm sure you never helped another girl make her dresses.'

Depths and subtleties beyond him. But he replied merely, 'I'm sure I didn't.'

'No, you'd only do that for your wife. And then you wouldn't feel it beneath your masculinity.'

She turned to look at him, and Peter suddenly stopped his laughter. 'Are you of a jealous nature, Thaisa?' he asked, plunging.

'No — I don't think I get jealous. I feel just hurt; words stop in me.'

'That's worse.'

'Is it, Peter?' She gazed up at him with one of her little girl worshiping looks and fell to twisting her wedding ring.

Then with a suddenness that was frightening, she burst into tears. Peter, aghast, sat staring, not knowing the conventional procedure. As the storm continued, he sprang up, took her into his arms, returned to the couch and held her, sobbing, against his breast.

In time her tears lessened. Tenderness filled him. 'I understand, sweetheart,' he whispered. 'It has all been too much for you.'

She did not answer.

'A month of getting married, keeping house and making clothes — a new life. Thaisa darling, look up at me. After all, it's just our love beginning. But the strain has been mostly on you.'

'It is new,' she said, having got herself in hand. 'But it isn't just the outside things like cooking and sewing and dusting, Peter. It's what goes on inside.'

'Tell me. . . .'

'If I should fail! And it's so mixed up. I know you'll hate this — but I do want to be a good wife, I find.'

He held her closer. . . .

'A good wife, who is a happy wife and a singing wife, and oh, Peter, a picture wife.'

'All that—but also you're being a very practical little wife.'

'I know. I had to get started that way. Peter, though we're so happy, I've wakened shivering in the night, seeing dark shadows.'

'You're tired out, that's it.'

'Is that all?' She settled down again in his arms. He held her like a child, and soon he felt her relax. The long

lashes swept her cheek and she slept, tired out, with little deep-drawn breaths.

Yes, she was a child. How thoughtlessly he had accepted these last few weeks. First there was the breaking away from Richard who had made it so hard for her — the severing of the home ties. Then the quick marriage, the settling into a new life. And she was sensitive and afraid, he remembered. She longed so for the beautiful — the wholly perfect.

He rose carefully with her still in his arms and put her down on the couch. 'Yes, just a little girl,' he thought, paternally. 'She loves chocolate caramels; I'll just go out and get her some. . . .'

9

But even though she had cried so childishly, and with no apparent cause, Thaisa felt that she was maturing. Peter left her alone in her thoughts, and she was finding her freedom a continued joy. She looked forward to the coming years with faith in their rich promise. She and Peter — finding a more and more beautiful harmony.

So in these early days she would dream. And meet Peter at night with glowing eyes and upturned face for his rapturous kiss.

And after their simple dinner they would go for a walk to the lake or take a ride on the park bus. Simple pleasures, but bringing a sense of closeness that kept Thaisa winging for many days afterwards in the mere memory of them.

Then one lovely summer night, Peter took her to a party out on the South Side at Sanford Brighton's studio. This

Brighton was interesting, he told her. Didn't believe in marriage and had just taken a third wife.

As they entered Brighton's studio, he was standing near the door, expounding some theory about woman. He broke off to stare across the room and to shout: 'Behold Peter Dagmar and his bride.'

This introduction added to Thaisa's shyness; she pressed closer to Peter. In a moment they were surrounded by people who seemed to Peter to gabble a lot and lay too ridiculous a stress on how funny it was that Peter Dagmar had at last succumbed to a bond.

Foster, restless and a bit bored, came up to meet Thaisa. They talked a moment; then Foster moved away. 'I know now, Peter,' Thaisa whispered when they were alone for a moment. 'I know that you are really the leading spirit of the magazine.'

'Nonsense,' said Peter, well pleased.

She flashed him a warm glance, bestowing knighthood. Brighton returning, immediately possessed himself of Thaisa and, holding tight to her arm, led her across the long, narrow room. She observed that it was exotically furnished in apricot and black with one flaming wall picture of some cubist study, the meaning of which was totally blank to Thaisa. Peter saw her go, not entirely happy about it, yet relieved to know that she was going to mix with his crowd.

He went about himself then, mingling, but he kept his eye on Thaisa. Brighton, he saw, was filling her up, talking and gesticulating with his long slender hands, probably getting her all confused — impressing her, of course. So after a time Peter edged in closer.

Thaisa, seeing him, turned. Peter could almost hear her words: 'My husband is looking for me. . . .' and flushed faintly. 'Come along, Thaisa,' he managed, 'let Brighton talk his theories to some one else for a change.'

Foster came up. 'Oh, Mrs. Dagmar,' he began, 'they're dancing in the next room. Would you care to have a turn?'

'I'd love to,' said Thaisa and moved away, leaving Peter alone again.

Peter suddenly felt old and savage and brutal. One or two others took Thaisa from Foster; Brighton with his third little wife, a pretty creature, came bearing coffee and sandwiches, and after this some one sang. In a short time Peter decided that Thaisa was tired. Obediently she secured her wrap and they went out together.

There were four blocks to walk to the car. 'Were you interested in that kind of party, Thaisa?' Peter asked.

'Yes, though it was all strange and new to me.'

'At one of the parties there was quite a scene. Sanford's wife, Gertrude, became intensely jealous because of his attentions to a Joyce Harmon. She did rip it out — in public.'

'Like my mother,' said Thaisa.

Peter saw he had been thoughtless. 'I'm sorry,' he stammered.

'It doesn't matter; but these people believe in freedom, don't they? Why should Gertrude have made the row?'

'Brighton, at our next party, with Gertrude beside him — quite calm and sane again — gave the real explanation.'

'I should like to hear it.'

'Good stuff, I thought. He said a woman with a child is apt to revert. In fact, he had been warned of just that possi-

bility when he married Gertrude, so he sought to make his third marriage a success by adding the element lacking in the first two. 'There'd been no children before.'

'Yes, Peter — go on.'

'Well, there's not much more. I suppose motherhood, as Sanford claims, does make a woman reactionary and primitive for a time. She wants her mate, since she's afraid of losing his support and protection when she most needs it. And Gertrude fully agrees with that theory. She believes the phase of possession will pass with her, and that as the child grows older and is less helpless and in need of her care, she in turn will require less of the father.'

They had reached the corner now and stopped to await their car. Thaisa remained silent. Suddenly she looked up at Peter. 'I think,' she said very slowly, 'that all that sort of talk is horridly dishonest.'

Peter, thrown back, stared at his wife. Was it only a week ago he had brought chocolate caramels to a child?

10

She told him, after that, that she didn't want any more parties — not for a time, anyway. So he took her around to hear music and to lectures. One night they went to hear a Brahmin lecture, given by a dark man, worn down through excessive poise to a mere shadow. Thaisa told Peter she liked him. 'I liked particularly what he said about loving one's self.'

Peter stared at her. It had seemed ridiculous to him.

From this they searched into other cults. Reincarnation,

spiritualism. But Thaisa confessed she was afraid of peeping into shade realms. She would go silent, apparently looking deep into herself. 'I think I'd have to live the first-hand, direct life,' she finally decided.

Amazing. But he answered her in kind. 'After a while, in this belief, I can see that you'd not use your own creative faculties — just be carried away by external phenomena.'

Thaisa nodded. 'But I can see about reincarnation — that it would answer a lot where people are thwarted and puzzled.'

'Yes, but no scientific basis. These people advance plenty of good-sounding theories, but when anyone gets a fixed notion, he can discover all sorts of fantasies to uphold it.'

Thaisa could understand that, too.

And so they wandered all over the city. . . . From respectable Orchestra Hall talks to exhortations by fiery orators who spoke on freedom from corner soap boxes.

And Peter got to believe that he was educating his wife in his own way.

In time, a letter came from Richard. Peter's generous expressions and his gratitude for the gift of Richard's daughter had touched him. He hoped, he said, some day to come to Chicago to see them both.

Thaisa, when Peter showed her Richard's letter, flung her arms about him. 'It was nice of you to open the way,' she cried. 'I haven't told you how I felt about Father — how I've longed to be friends again. And to think that perhaps he will come here! Peter, you are wonderful!'

Peter threw out his chest. He was getting along, he saw, in the fine art of relationship.

But he dreamed that night that he was walking a tight rope. He nearly lost his balance and was just able to clutch at something long and silky, yet strong as steel. At first, he was not conscious of what this was until suddenly Thaisa looked up, and he saw it was her hair to which he clung. He must have hurt her frightfully, but she was smiling, and she said, 'Never mind, Peter; just so you don't fall.'

II

One day, toward fall, Foster told Peter that things weren't going just right with the magazine.

Peter knew this for Foster's restlessness; he had tired of his toy. But Peter was worried. Out of a job! And now there was Thaisa. He was a married man.

Thaisa saw that something had gone wrong. 'What is it, Peter?'

'Going to lose my job.'

'Is that all? What does that matter?'

'What does it matter? Why, I'm married now.'

Married! Was he resenting this truth? A cold hand touched her. She stood waiting for him to speak again — the color gone from her face. When he remained silent, she turned and went into the little kitchen.

Peter sorry he was married — when marriage meant facing responsibility. Sorry he had sent for her!

After supper, Peter, with a short word, went to a shelf and took down a chessboard and a small box. He drew forth a table and arranged the board and the men.

Thaisa, remembering the same scene in the shack at

Ranger, when Peter and Richard had shut themselves away from reality, felt the coldness within her deepen.

And this night she had news to give him.

She waited. An hour passed, and Peter was still moving his pawns — silly, brainless pawns. Silly Peter engaged in such pastime! And suddenly Thaisa laughed.

At something in his wife's voice, Peter looked up, drawn irresistibly out of that vacuum in which, when life irked him, he could by dint of pawns and checkers, isolate himself.

Some expression too in Thaisa's face made him turn quickly. 'What is it?' he asked, rising.

'I had news for you — you had news for me,' she responded.

'What — tell me.'

She spoke quietly: 'A child. . . . I went to the doctor, because I didn't know. . . . Every symptom points that way. . . .' She tried to smile.

Peter felt a strange, rather awful thrill. He stood without moving for a second; then he rushed to her, crashing the kings and pawns to the floor. He was beside her — on his knees — his head on her folded hands.

'Thaisa. . . . Thaisa!'

'Are you glad?'

'Glad? A child of one's own has always seemed a miracle to me. I'm glad and frightened.'

Later, they sat very close, without words. Then after a time they began to talk. Thaisa, stirred by an emotion she had never before known, felt deeply Peter's solemnity, his solicitude for her.

‘I am strong with you beside me, Peter,’ she said. Then, closing her eyes: ‘At first, when the doctor told me, I was horribly frightened.’

‘I will be with you every moment,’ he told her.

‘I couldn’t endure it otherwise,’ she said.

But Peter’s arms were about her — strong and protecting. ‘And it’s all made easier,’ he told her, ‘by modern science. And you shall have everything. . . .’

Just now he felt courageous enough, powerful enough, to go out and obtain any job in the world — self-sacrificing enough to earn and to save money until there should be sufficient for every need, and then to write the book or the play of the age.

Night after night they talked. ‘We must teach him to be honest in every way,’ said Thaisa. Her eyes were very large and dark.

‘Honest with life and with himself,’ Peter went on in his new, deep voice. ‘We must help him with the difficult struggle of meeting reality, if need be, unprotected and alone.’

She smiled whimsically at him. ‘You couldn’t just go to playing checkers and shut a child out, Peter. That wouldn’t be fair.’

‘I shouldn’t want to, Thaisa. I shouldn’t want to shut out life ever again. A child’s a serious proposition.’

‘Peter, how strange that you feel that way. I think only of beauty.’

‘I can see how he’d do something for both of us where we both need help. . . . Of course, Thaisa, you’ll spoil him.’

‘I hope so.’

‘In any event, I think we should try to get to Europe to live. There are schools there far in advance of anything we have here.’

‘But by the time he’s ready there may be such schools here, Peter.’

‘It takes a great many years to change certain ideas. . . . We must be very careful. . . . Some schools, with their system of espionage, train children into expert liars. . . . Others train not only in deceit but in snobbery.’

‘Yes, Peter.’

She saw with some amazement what a marvelous interest and awakening this new element would bring into Peter’s life.

And then their hopes were dashed. All signs had failed.

12

Thaisa grew depressed after this hard disappointment. Peter, hiding his own feelings, strove to divert her. He invited people to the studio. There were parties lasting into early morning, at one of which complacent Myra Kenyon tried to commit suicide by swallowing poison.

Thaisa heard a little cry in the kitchen, and saying nothing to the others, she went to the smaller room and found Myra leaning against the table, her face deadly white. . . .

‘What is it, Myra?’ Thaisa cried in alarm.

‘I want Peter,’ the girl whispered.

Thaisa summoned Peter. ‘Peter,’ Myra began through twisted lips, ‘I’ve taken poison.’

‘My God!’ cried Peter.

Sanford Brighton came to the door. 'Find a doctor,' Thaisa said to him quietly, 'and get rid of the crowd in some way.'

Thaisa secured an emetic and brought the glass to Myra, who pushed it away. Writhing in pain, she stood with Peter's arms about her.

'Peter,' she cried, 'Peter, why did you marry this lifeless doll!'

'Hush!' said Peter sternly, 'Hush!'

He piloted her into the front room. Brighton had done a quick job; the place was clear. Insisting against her remonstrances, Peter laid Myra on the couch.

'Peter . . . Peter. . . .' she moaned.

Thaisa put the glass down and stood very quiet, the color gone from her face.

'I'm sorry to say this, now when you're suffering,' said Peter, 'but you're a fool, Myra.'

'I've always cared for you, and if that's what makes me a fool . . . It didn't matter so much when you were free — as you said you always would be. . . .'

'That's enough,' said Peter savagely, catching a glimpse of Thaisa's eyes. 'Try to rest till the doctor comes.'

But Myra implored him: 'Peter, you did care when we went about together before *she* came. . . .' and as she saw the revulsion in his face. ' . . . your little country girl — the kind your type always takes up with.' Her malice was lost in another sharp agony of pain.

The doctor came, made his examinations, ordered the hospital. 'I'll send an ambulance.'

'No. . . . No!' Myra cried.

‘ Couldn’t she go in a taxi? ’ Thaisa asked the physician. ‘ She can sit up, can’t she? ’

He smiled. ‘ She’s taken just enough of the stuff to give her bad cramps.’ And from Myra’s conscious eyes Thaisa turned away.

The doctor was a kindly man who attended to all the details. Myra was better in a few days and able to leave the hospital. Still the thing got out, and Thaisa went about with head held high, but with lips in which there was no color.

‘ You know Myra’s story is a fantasy,’ Peter said. ‘ You know that, Thaisa.’

She did realize that, but she felt a sudden sickness of this life that Peter had always known. ‘ It all is so wretchedly dishonest,’ she said, ‘ — even Myra’s attempt. She wasn’t courageous enough to go the whole way.’

‘ It would take some courage to do that.’

‘ Of course; but the pretense — to bring about . . . ’

What? She paused to look at him. Did Myra think that Peter would break his marriage to the little country girl who was so passionless?

Myra, nor any of her kind, could know the swift, deep passion that Thaisa was capable of feeling. And Myra’s futile gesture had stirred these passions into a swift stream. A stream of longing for fresh winds and the woods, and sound, sweet talk with a winging companion.

Peter, helpless, looked on. That Myra should select him for the play of her dramatics was beyond all measure cynical.

He had enough to think about. In June, Foster’s magazine quietly died, but Foster somewhat in expiation offered Peter his cottage at Crystal Lake for the summer.

Peter seized on this offer. The change would do Thaisa good — help her forget the wretched episode of Myra.

13

Crystal Lake was lovely and the cottage convenient — a three-room affair with long casement windows which commanded an entrancing view of water and irregular distant hills.

Thaisa, having gone through some deep mental processes, had come to the decision to let bygones be bygones and start afresh. She had entered Peter's world, a world of which she knew little, and she must adapt herself.

Having come to this conclusion, Thaisa did not turn back. She had no undercurrents; so she was not only pleasant and happy on the surface, but was free from dark thoughts beneath.

But Peter was not so resilient. Myra had disturbed some lovely element dwelling in the life he and Thaisa lived together. And he had lost his job.

He was greatly in debt, and the day when he could send Thaisa to dramatic school was put off again — far away.

So when the rain began and poured down in dismal torrents, he began to wander about disconsolately. Suddenly he cried out: 'Let's go back to Chicago. I can't stand this greyness any longer.'

'It is wretched, but couldn't you get down to some writing and shut it out?'

'Heavens no, I haven't a thought in my head. I'd like to

run a thousand miles away where it's bright and where there are crowds and lots of noise.'

'All right, let's pretend we're running away. I'll race you to the end of the pier.'

She stood there before him, so young, so desirous of being happy, and something within him mocked — for what really could he give her out of this mood of black ugliness? He turned away, went to the window and shivered at the sound of wind and water. Thaisa said, 'I know what it is to hate ugliness, but the rain isn't ugly. And besides, we're here together.'

His heart ached over her, but he understood her way. She must have been frightfully disillusioned after Myra's action, even though he felt she believed that Myra had no case; but as always, she was shutting down on her deeper feelings so there might be harmony. . . .

And since he did not answer, but stood there gazing at her with some expression in his eyes she could not read, she turned, found her raincoat and went out.

Left alone, he wandered aimlessly about; then on a top shelf, over a cupboard, he found a set of building blocks. He thought of old-world cathedrals and began to build. Fascinating work — shutting out reality. He was barely aware of Thaisa's return. Her voice came to him out of some other region.

Two steeples reared themselves. Suddenly he felt a soft arm about his neck. 'I am lonely, Peter,' Thaisa whispered. Her arm shifting, toppled over one of his steeples.

'For Heaven's sake, Thaisa!' he cried irritably.

'I'm sorry.'

‘Well, never mind. Run along and play.’

‘I’m not a child, Peter.’

‘Is this withdrawn manner a threat?’ He tried now to speak lightly as a fear grew within him, a fear that he had definitely hurt some fragile beauty. But he was helpless with himself. He was more than a cruel brute. But there he sat, eyes on his blocks, unable to meet her pleas and her needs.

It was long after midnight when he left the blocks and went to lie in one of the bunks which was built into the wall. Thaisa slept in a cot drawn near an open door; the rain must have splashed her face. He looked down into her lovely face and wondered sadly if ever really he had touched her soul awake.

The next day the rain stopped, but of this Peter was scarcely conscious. Vaguely he heard Thaisa pulling the flat-bottomed boat out of the basement to run it into the side canal that led to the lake. He had a third steeple erected before she returned.

He placed four triangles along a wall and felt joy at a completed design. Carefully he built; a long, oval clear space ensued. A sculptor could fill in here with a life-sized figure of an angel flaming at the gate.

Life went on, monotonously, even though war across the water had lifted its ugly head. Then Thaisa began again to talk of a job. ‘I’m twenty-two, a grown woman, with really nothing to do,’ she told Peter. ‘It’s absurd.’

He did not answer. He was free-lancing now and not making very much headway.

‘I can get home in time to cook dinner.’ She gazed about the studio. ‘And the work is really nothing.’

‘What do you think of doing?’

‘I’ve been studying shorthand at home here, and I can learn typing.’

‘What for?’

‘To get a job, as I’ve said, Peter — save some money and go into old John Lewis’ Dramatic School.’

Exactly what he had intended to do for her. Failure here as everywhere. Always she must do for herself, it seemed.

She bought an old typewriter — so as not to hurt Peter’s machine — studied shorthand, and amazingly found herself a position.

That day she came home with her news, and Peter told her he had made plans to be psycho-analyzed.

Thaisa looked a little bewildered. Peter went on, ‘The man I’m going to is a wonder. He’ll get at my trouble, the cause of my dissatisfactions.’

‘Oh!’ still amazed. ‘What does he think?’

‘Some stoppage, something deep rooted. At any rate, I’m not to write till everything is cleared up.’

‘But it seems silly to stop your work. After all, Peter, isn’t it better just to go on living and experiencing — and after a while getting straight with yourself?’

‘No, it’s deeper than that.’

‘Couldn’t you do it for yourself?’

‘No; it takes more courage than I’ve got.’

So Peter spent most of his time being analyzed, and Thaisa

went on with her work, typing in a South Water Street house.

‘Of course you’ve lost all faith in me, Thaisa,’ he said one day.

‘No. . . . But I must hold on to my job, because right now we have to eat and to pay the rent. And sometimes I think I’d like to live differently.’ She looked around the small studio.

‘You’d like to fly away. I know that, Thaisa.’

‘It would be nice to have wings.’

‘And so you take a job as typist in a South Water Street house — moving among decaying vegetables.’

She laughed: ‘Perhaps that’s my way of being psycho-analyzed.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh, Peter, I don’t know. Don’t men and women always do the same thing differently?’

15

Later, Peter dropped his study of psycho-analysis; even the psychic interpretation of dreams ceased to enthrall him. Then he turned to behaviorism, but found its method of inquiry too cold and drab. In despair of finding ultimate truth anywhere in modern psychology, he threw the whole thing up.

Then Foster sent for him again. Peter found the new venture being issued from important looking quarters in a Jackson Boulevard building. Foster — who seemed to have deepened into a new sincerity since by some investment he

had lost a great deal of money — suggested that Peter do an editorial a week for him and some editing of other men's stuff.

Peter accepted.

When he reached home, he found that Richard had arrived for the long-promised visit before going on to New York. He had been at the studio a few hours and had already persuaded Thaisa to give up her job in the belief that he could while in Chicago, get her into some experimental theatre, either on Michigan Avenue or out south near Stony Island.

So Peter, who had rushed home to tell her that she could go in at once to study with old John Lewis, felt his plans again gone awry. . . .

But he greeted Richard cordially. 'He has escaped,' said Thaisa to Peter, after they had seen Richard to his hotel. 'Did you notice how vague he was about this business in New York?'

'He was vague,' Peter agreed.

The next day, Richard took them to the Loop for luncheon. They went down the street together, Thaisa appearing small between the two men, each of whom held an elbow, thus piloting her, they thought.

Richard now was in the gayest of spirits. At the table, in a little Wabash Avenue restaurant, he and Peter talked — perfectly in tune it seemed. Thaisa leaning back watched them, a smile at her lips.

When a lull came, she said, 'You haven't told me yet how things are at home, Father.'

As though brought down from some height, he gazed at her a second. 'Oh, very good indeed,' he returned at last.

‘I’m still with the theatre. We live in Portland. The old farm is quite done for — really a tumble-down shack now.’

‘Abandoned, you mean?’

‘Exactly. A deserted place. . . . So many have moved away from that locality.’

‘And Mother and the boys?’

‘Well, quite well. Doesn’t Jenny write? I don’t find time.’

‘She writes occasionally.’ Thaisa was sure now that all his ingenuity had been called upon to persuade Jenny to allow him to travel afar, leaving her at home.

He turned definitely to Peter, and Peter received him gladly. They went on for an hour of contention, conjectures, surmises, formulas to settle the world, automatically partaking of food that meant nothing to them. At last: ‘Peter, you should get to New York. Can’t you make it?’

A flush of intense desire rose to Peter’s face. ‘I’ve wanted to,’ he confessed. ‘It hasn’t seemed possible.’

‘It would probably prove to be well worth your while.’

‘No doubt; and some day Thaisa and I will pull up stakes and go.’

‘Some day! I wish you could go on with me when I leave here.’

‘Why don’t you do that, Peter?’ Thaisa spoke in a voice that was quite steady. ‘I could stay here for a while and join you later.’

She saw that he was aglow with the thought of change, of moving on. ‘We’ll talk about it later,’ he answered.

Richard said, ‘Have you heard that Ian Trevor is on the road to making himself famous?’

‘What is he doing?’ Thaisa inquired.

‘Building bridges, as he set out to do; but he has carried through some remarkable pieces of work — so I hear from his aunt.’ Richard turned to Peter. ‘Is it any news to you, Peter, that Ian was desperately in love with Thaisa? He turned up after she left Portland, looking utterly woe-begone.’

‘No news at all,’ Peter said.

‘But Thaisa wasn’t in love with him, or else she did not know her own heart,’ Richard commented mischievously. ‘Well, I liked Ian,’ he finished.

‘You might have been married to a successful man who could have helped you to a large career, Thaisa,’ Peter put in. ‘Aren’t you sorry now?’

‘You know I’m not.’

But he gazed at her in the searching way he had acquired, and as his eyes met hers, she saw the questioning in them.

‘Let’s go this afternoon,’ said Richard, ‘to the Lewis Shop on Stony Island. They’re doing good work, these players, and it’s there I thought Thaisa might get in.’

So they went to the South Side and came to a large shop just off Stony Island Avenue where a Little Theatre experiment was being carried on.

They stopped to gaze in the window. A purple rep curtain was hung against the glass, and leaning against it a card announced that the Lewis Players were giving a *matinée* that afternoon.

Richard grandly paid the way, and they went inside. The space within was long and narrow and had been converted into an auditorium with small folding chairs in half circles.

At one end of the stage, a step higher than the auditorium, a faded velvet curtain hung in folds.

The first little play was well done; the second one not so good; and the third — with a young American taking the part of a loyal Chinaman — Thaisa thought superb. After the final curtain had been lowered and the three dozen persons who had occupied the folding chairs were circulating about talking and laughing, Thaisa sat quite still, excitement still painting crimson spots in her cheek. She was feeling deeply, burningly, the hideous exposure of third degree methods, the poor Chinaman knowing seemingly only one emotion, love for his master.

She awoke to find that Peter and Richard were standing near, talking to the young man who had taken the part of the Chinaman, and Peter was saying: 'You'll be interested in meeting Bertram Lewis, Thaisa.'

Bertram Lewis was tall, dark and somber. His lips were finely cut and sensitive, his hands long and slender. He said at once to Thaisa, 'You want to be on the stage. Why aren't you there?'

Thaisa flushed. 'It's true I've always wanted to play.'

He still continued to gaze at her in reflective manner. 'You are talented, that's easily to be seen,' he said at last. He turned to look at Peter. Peter said sharply: 'My wife is perfectly free to do as she pleases.'

'Is she?' the young man asked. 'Is any woman, once she's taken on marriage?'

They all laughed in varying degree of response. Outside, Thaisa said, 'Father, I'd love to get in with that group.'

‘I thought you might,’ Richard returned.

Peter said, ‘If you want to try, go ahead, Thaisa.’

‘Thank you, Peter,’ she answered demurely.

16

She went again with Richard to the Little Shop. Bertram Lewis was there, alone. He greeted the visitors very cordially.

‘You’ve a clever organization,’ Richard began, when they were seated together on the empty stage.

Lewis liked to talk, and he found responsive listeners. Here in this small theatre he had been experimenting, and he had about concluded that there was as much insincerity in the Little Theatre business as in any of the purely commercial groups. More posing too. If he wanted to present a melodrama reeking with all the condemned virtues, he did not hesitate. And he found he held his audiences, a mixed company nearly always, when he presented either the blood and thunder stuff, put on by his players, he conceded, with their tongues in their cheek, or the little modern one-act plays made by young radicals.

Thaisa, listening to him, thought Lewis was really inspired by some newer spiritual consciousness. ‘All art,’ he went on, ‘should get at the root necessities of people, and some of those necessities aren’t nearly so aesthetic as the poet makes out — much more brutal, much nearer the elemental. Use melodrama, I say then, in the theatre, but with a depth of meaning not at all obscured and overpowered by the blood and thunder story. And have an ending of the spirit. Now it

takes genius to weld all these apparently fundamentally warring elements together.'

'Peter will do that some day,' said Thaisa suddenly.

'And you will take a part in his plays,' said Lewis. 'Very good.'

'My daughter . . .' Richard began. But Lewis interrupted, 'She is meant for greatness. But there'll be a lot for her to live first. I was sorry to hear that she is married. She should be alone, never tied.'

'Ah, but love . . .!' Richard was beginning grandly.

'Yes, but who knows love?' Lewis sat staring at some distance. '. . . Thaisa — your entire name I've forgotten?'

'Thaisa Dagmar — Worthington first, you know.'

'Thaisa Worthington. Well, come in with us. Twenty-five dollars a week to begin with.'

Richard looked his astonishment at the young Jew, but Lewis went on imperturbably. 'It's just this. She will be great in some distant day — make no mistake about that. Then Lewis will be remembered.'

When they were leaving Thaisa asked: 'Are you any relation to John Lewis, the Shakespearean actor?'

'He is my uncle, and I studied with him for some time.'

Strange how sometimes the pattern came clear. She had wanted to study with old John Lewis. . . . Going in with his nephew was about the same.

So Thaisa went in with the Lewis Players. Lewis, she found, dominated all the others who worked with him. He

was versatile. He had written several of the plays that were produced, and he designed the slight scenery sets used. Thaisa did not know until long afterwards that her salary came out of his pocket. Indeed, most of the expenses of the small place were borne by him. Evidently his father — she had heard this person was very rich — indulged his only son.

She was given a part in one of Bertram's plays. It was a small part, but she was greatly excited. Peter and Richard sat in front, and when she came on she saw only their faces. She felt that she was awkward and self-conscious and that she fumbled her lines. She left the stage in a fever of embarrassment.

But Lewis was kind and encouraging. He believed wholly in her. And Richard and Peter, coming behind later, congratulated her.

Bertram went away. 'You've got the necessary something, Thaisa,' said Peter. 'You'll go on from here.'

'You'll have good grounding,' said Richard, who — liking Chicago — had settled down to stay longer than he had at first intended.

'And I'll work terribly hard.'

'You're happy,' said Peter in a low voice, '. . . happier than you've been for a long time.'

'A different sort of happiness,' she said. And, trying to remove the dark look from his eyes: 'Some day you will write a play and I will have a part.'

'Some day I may be able to do something for you,' he said and turned abruptly away.

Lewis was returning, accompanied by a man and a woman. Even before he came close, Thaisa saw that he was

in love with the woman and that she seemed wholly indifferent. Then when they were near, Thaisa heard a murmured name, '... Reba Van Valkenberg!' The words 'drenched in scent' returned to her, though they had not been applied to this girl but to her mother. Reba — the girl of the sparkling necklace! She was beautiful, with exquisite coloring, violet eyes and ash-colored hair. She looked fragile, yet there was something hardy in her personality. And while Thaisa stood, still lost in amazement, it was Reba who spoke:

'Thaisa Worthington! I saw your name in the program, and Bertram also told me of you. I came to see for myself if you were the girl I once knew.'

Introductions followed. The man with Reba was Ordway Strangeley, dramatic critic for the Sun. After a few words, Reba and Thaisa were left alone.

'Strange you should have known me at once,' returned Thaisa.

'Of course. You've scarcely changed. And you would have known me?'

'I think so. Though you'd grown really to be a figure in an incident to me.'

'Interesting. Do tell me!'

'Well, the thing touched little Ellen Garret, a child in your mother's Sunday School class who wanted a string of amber beads, and your mother ...'

'Oh, I understand what Mother would say.'

'Well, she said it — a flannel petticoat, the alternative. And all the time you were standing close by, with a lovely string of pearls about your small neck.'

‘Rotten, wasn’t it? I don’t doubt that Ellen Garret needed a flannel petticoat very badly, but Mother’s point of view . . .’

‘It was all confusing to me. . . .’

‘You got Ellen’s angle?’

‘I thought I did. Because I’d rather have beauty in those days than to be warm.’

Reba stood contemplating Thaisa. ‘But candidly, you’re just the same. You were a small girl with large, changing eyes that seemed always seeking, and your face was thin and pale. You were really very distinctive.’

She paused reflectively. ‘And you’ve still the searching look; it’s covered in part, but still there. . . . You’re very lovely,’ she finished abruptly.

Thaisa was quiet. She was thinking of Reba’s dresses that she had once worn; of Jenny going to the back door of the large house. This memory returning caused her anguish even now. It was one of the experiences she had crushed down — one of which she would never speak, so poignant its continued hurt.

Now recalling herself, she said, ‘Your mother is well?’

‘Oh, enormously so. Busy, too. She’s interested just now in a working girl’s charity, and she has a young secretary coming to her nights to keep accounts of the money begged.’ Reba paused. ‘Mother and her working girls! She never inquires how this pretty young secretary gets home nights, nor even where she lives. Nor whether she earns enough money to feed herself properly. My mother is very immoral,’ she finished coolly.

Thaisa laughed.

‘Come and see me, won’t you?’ Reba asked. ‘I’m interested in a lot of things, but we could have some fun together.’ And then: ‘If you must, bring your husband.’

‘Don’t you like husbands?’

A strange look, not then to be interpreted by Thaisa, crossed Reba’s face.

‘Not as husbands,’ she returned lightly. ‘But you will come to see me won’t you, Thaisa?’

Thaisa promised. Strangeley, leaving a group, came to them. He was debonair, handsome and totally indifferent. But Thaisa saw a look on Reba’s face that disclosed her secret. And pity filled her heart.

18

Peter didn’t like Reba, and therefore he refused to attend any of her parties. Thaisa went because she enjoyed Reba and because she met many people of interest who came to the great old house on Michigan Avenue.

Reba had a long studio-room on the top floor. Large spaces and long windows draped in gold-colored silks, cretonne-covered chairs and couches, plain rugs on the floor, all made for atmosphere. Here she gathered her friends and quite shut away her mother’s kind. Her father, who, according to Reba’s frank opinion, was fortunate to have inherited wealth, rather admired his daughter’s independence. Most of his time he spent studying his butterfly lore. There lay his heart, his real love.

One Sunday evening, Reba, who had been away, rejoined

her guests. She drew Thaisa to one side. 'I've been to Father's menagerie,' she said. 'His man Alexander, has sent him three caterpillars from the farm in Wisconsin. Beauties, really — brilliant blue with black bands and two rows of golden knobs down their backs, and feet that make little vacuums. Actually, Father quite carried me away with his enthusiasm.'

'I'd love them.'

'And he'd adore you if you said that to him. He stayed up all night feeding the little things sips of sweetened water.'

'Why don't you go in for something, Reba? You have ideas.'

'Ideas? No, I'm just going to prove the right of the purely commonplace person to vegetate.'

'You vegetate!'

'What else? . . . There's Ordway, impressing that Whitty girl. Ah, now he's coming over here. Prepare yourself, Thaisa. I believe he has a criticism for you.'

Strangeley did begin at once. 'Well, Thaisa, you're putting a bit too much sentimentality into your work. I believe it's because you're living the conventional life, and it won't do.'

'What would you suggest then?' she asked, demurely.

'Are you advising Thaisa to divorce her husband?' Reba asked.

'Quite. The artist should be free.'

'Write a play for her,' said Reba. 'Make her the woman of the future, being ruthless.'

'I may, at that,' replied Strangeley. 'I've been thinking of dramatizing a woman — a sex experimentalist of a danger-

ous sort. She is trying to find herself, and she doesn't care what others have to suffer to help her get there.'

'You'd do it brilliantly since you're something of an experimentalist yourself — though you'd never get scorched,' Reba returned.

'I'm not an experimentalist. Simply, I don't think love is everything. You Reba, want love, as all women do.'

'Nonsense!' Reba was stirred to indignation. 'Woman should want love, you believe, and so, despite all she says or does to show differently, you keep on pretending to believe that love is her life.'

Brave Reba, Thaisa thought.

'Nonsense if you like,' answered Strangeley, undaunted.

'And men don't need love?' Thaisa asked.

'It's only half life for man.'

'You weary me,' said Reba.

'Well then, were all the great priests plain psychopaths, or what? And what about all the artists and scientists who make women secondary in their lives?'

'You're just a selfish brute of a man!' Reba cried. 'You want everything without paying for it — that's the story.'

'No. I'm like Thaisa here. She's an artist — I'm not; but we have the same difficulty in life; half in the picture and half out.'

'Thaisa's all right; she'll find the way. And it will be her own way.'

Thaisa felt a bit battered between her two friends. She rose now. 'Peter and my father are at the studio,' she said. 'I promised I'd be home early.'

'And leave my party flat? Peter and your father are

probably having a fine time discussing some gay and winging future,' Reba responded. 'Already I know Peter, and while I think he's charming, even if he doesn't like me, I think I have him catalogued.'

Thaisa didn't answer; she couldn't deny Peter's antagonistic feeling toward Reba. He didn't like her; she annoyed him as would any idle, rich girl who felt herself empowered to dominate, so he thought. Unfair, this appraisal, Thaisa told him, but she was not able to change his attitude.

Strangeley walked down the stairs with her, out into the street, and stood with her while she waited for a car. 'Now think a bit of what I've said,' he told her. 'You're too much divided in your life. You should cut away and run to your own mountain top.'

19

Reba did like to bait Peter. One day he returned home to find her drinking tea in the studio with Thaisa. She began at once, as she was wont to with him: 'You've a lovely wife, Peter. I knew her as a little girl.'

'So did I.'

'But you did not know my little girl here in Chicago.'

'No, before that, in New York.'

'Oh, well, let's not quarrel over who knows Thaisa best,' suddenly from Reba.

'No, don't,' Thaisa put in. 'I can't see where you'd get a quarrel out of me. . . . I wish Father would happen in.'

'Richard's making hay while the sun shines,' Peter said.

‘But I think now that even Chicago is ceasing to interest him. He’s ready to move on.’

‘He’s a faun,’ said Reba, ‘a perfectly delightful faun. No one will ever capture him. No wonder you like him, Peter. You must thoroughly understand him.’ Then she rose and leisurely departed.

‘Thaisa, I’ll commit murder some day if you continue to ring that girl in on me,’ Peter complained, the moment they were alone.

‘Reba’s beautiful,’ said Thaisa.

‘Only because you like her.’

‘I love her.’

‘I don’t.’

‘I can see you don’t. But she’s so real, so honest minded.’

‘She may be all that, but she’s terribly annoying with her high-handed ways.’

And to himself he was saying: Adolescent, poor fool, that’s the term for you. Don’t you want her to see anyone but you?

Thaisa — silent for a moment, gazing at him. Then: ‘That silver wing is beautiful, Peter. Reba says it spells the eternal adventurer.’

‘I think it does.’

‘Peter, is it that you want to be off — new places, new experiences? Let’s be plain with one another.’

Now they had come to issues. ‘It might help us both if I should go away,’ he admitted.

‘Very well.’

‘I’ll make my arrangements.’

‘Oh, Peter,’ she cried suddenly, ‘can’t we keep our love, remember its marvel?’

‘The truth is I’m a failure all along the line,’ he returned and collapsed into a mood of pure defeat.

In a passion of tenderness, she cried out, ‘No, no, Peter! Not when you mean so much to me.’

‘Oh, Thaisa. . . . Thaisa!’ holding her close.

It seemed again like the beginning. After that, they stayed together, scarcely separated. Nights, when Thaisa was finished at the Little Shop, Peter was there waiting for her. In the studio, they shut themselves away from the world, scarcely seeing even Richard.

Freedom! Thaisa thought of Strangeley’s advice. But here was love and freedom both. Not even in the glorious days of their honeymoon had they known such rapture.

And yet, little by little, the world crept into their retreat. Little by little. . . . Reba coming — wondering why Thaisa had not been to see her. And Richard, eager now to be away — New York calling him.

And Peter — as though coming out of a trance — listening to Richard, and Richard’s golden plans. . . . Bentley, dynamic head of the Experimental Theatre in New York. . . . The chance to meet one of the leading analysts. . . .

‘. . . No, it’s useless to talk about getting away now,’ Peter said at last. But the light of intense desire had risen in his eyes. Thaisa, standing near him, stilled the ache that came into her heart. She said steadily: ‘Why don’t you take a trip, Peter? You need a change.’

‘Not that so much. . . . Still, there is that new man who possibly can help me with his analysis.’ Peter went away to find Richard.

Left alone, Thaisa remained deep in thought. Oh, if only

he would remember the love that so recently had flamed into a new beauty for them — the peak of that hour, years ago, when they had been drawn to one another by an irresistible spiritual attraction.

That first meeting. . . . The little park in New York. She saw again the stranger, mystically appearing before her. How he had soothed her childish griefs — supported her in her dark loneliness. Her savior, Peter, a winged idealist, yearning toward some ever-beckoning Utopia. The young god of the tapestry.

Sacred and compelling, that coming together. Complete and wholly satisfying, what followed: the talks in the printing office; the gay wanderings and Peter's perfect understanding of how the mechanics of living weighted her; the solemn joy they had known when they exchanged their vows. And all these glories leading to the fulfillment of the covenant, their marriage. . . . All ordained.

To lose this vision would be to forfeit her faith in life. She must then hold to it desperately. She closed her eyes in hard concentration, but pushing through all her defenses, came the intolerable truth. Peter felt caught. Peter, when this knowledge pressed too sharply, turned to painted cards or ivory discs pushed over smooth boards. He took stones and built castles that afterwards, in bitter discontent, he destroyed. She saw it all — Peter irking at his chains. Why, he must hate her!

Then suddenly came the saving memory. Peter, leaving her in Ranger, returning to his place free, no tie to bind him; yet, when the strong hand of Destiny pressed upon him, he had not turned away. Instead, gladly and wholly

believing, he had sent for her to be his wife. And she, coming up through the pain of bewildered indecision, had been released, made whole by that summons. Destiny!

The anguished sense of something tangled and blurred — a false step taken — vanished. A calm wind blew upon her, and she laughed at her own intensities. She had endured tortured moments simply because Peter was leaving for a needed change, as she had pointed out to him. Soon he would return; there would be reunion; and life, with a new quality added, would go on richly.

She saw them both off a few days later. The leave-taking had been tender and sad, but Thaisa held her head proudly. That reborn faith in a predestined union did not fail her.

But when she opened the studio door, the empty darkness struck her like a blow. Groping to the couch, she sank down. She buried her face in her hands, and the slow tears crept from between her locked fingers.

20

The week after Peter went away, the Little Shop theatre closed rather abruptly. The weather was growing warm and people did not attend indoor amusements so much.

On the night of the last performance, Thaisa left the shop, tired and depressed. The thought of the lonely studio awaiting her return made her shiver. She felt lost, abandoned in a strange and twisted world.

She left the street car at Randolph to change, but waiting for the bridge vehicle was irksome. She was so weary that

she hailed a taxicab and relaxed into its depths as it took her over the river to the studio.

The cab stopped before her home. The street was poorly lit, but as she neared the steps, she glimpsed a dark bulk — a bulk that at her appearance divided itself into three parts and stood swaying toward her.

‘Mother!’ Thaisa cried. And then: ‘Richard and Paul.’

‘And waiting hours! Where have you been?’ Jenny inquired, quite as though Thaisa were still a child at her knee. ‘I thought some one might be here. Your husband, if you weren’t.’

‘Peter went away last week.’

‘I see — I might have known it.’ Thaisa led the way through the hall to the studio. The boys, who now reached Thaisa’s shoulder, cried out that they were hungry, and Thaisa was thankful that she had cookies and milk to offer.

‘I came,’ said Jenny, ‘just to leave the boys with you, while I go on to New York.’

‘New York?’

‘Yes. You may let your man go galivanting without a word, but I’m going after mine. I’ll surprise him.’

‘But, Mother, do you think that’s fair — without giving Father warning?’

‘Warning, you say! Does he ever give me warning? No, I’m on my way,’ Jenny reiterated. ‘No telling what he’ll do. He may even go back to England and get into the war.’

Jenny, it transpired later, had sold all her furniture in Portland — cut all associations there. The theatre people were angered because Richard had stayed away so long, and the end had come — in that town, in any event.

‘And Ranger,’ she went on, ‘is an abandoned place. Mrs. MacFarland has long since gone — and many others we knew. So we’ll probably just stay in New York.’

‘You’ll have to send for the boys.’

‘In time. . . . But I’ll be better able at first to manage Richard alone. That’s why I’m leaving the children with you for a time.’

‘Couldn’t you have taken the children to the farm, Mother, and waited there?’

‘God forbid. . . . You wouldn’t know the spot. Not a soul about. . . . And I’d rather follow him than meekly wait till he gets ready to come back, down and out. . . . I kept boarders while he was away and I’ll not do that again.’

Thaisa was silent. They were sitting in the larger room in Thaisa’s place the morning after Jenny’s arrival, talking. The boys were playing in the street just outside.

‘But Mother, it doesn’t seem just the thing, to go after Father. Didn’t he have business in New York?’

‘As much as yours did. What did yours say he was going for, anyway?’

‘Peter went to be psycho-analyzed.’

‘Oh, another way of fooling himself along in laziness.’ Jenny would not admit her ignorance here.

‘But Mother, it’s a new science that men have of finding out about themselves.’

‘Finding out about themselves! And I suppose paying good money for it?’

‘Yes, it’s rather a costly procedure.’

‘I thought so. Well, I’d tell them without charge all about themselves — yours and mine and any others that try to find

an excuse for not working at what's set before them and evadin' their responsibilities.'

Thaisa smiled. 'I've thought something like that at times, Mother. But there are sick people who have been helped in this way — sensitive people who were injured by wrong handling in childhood.'

'Too bad about them!' Jenny returned harshly. 'Let them that can't face the gaff go under — that's what I say. They'll always be looking for some excuse, anyway.'

'Mother, perhaps we don't really understand!'

'Understand! Let me tell you this, my girl — them that's always looking for getting away from what they've brought on themselves would be bad off if there weren't somebody like you and me to stand by.'

Thaisa smiled again at the thought of human inconsistencies. If Thaisa didn't stand by now, Jenny would find it a little difficult to rush off and reclaim her own. But she remained silent. Jenny would have some picturesque retort anyway.

21

Thaisa had been obliged completely to make over the small studio. A neighbor, a woman artist across the hall, had lent her a cot and some bedding, and they had managed to rest. Jenny, lying beside Thaisa, slept soundly, but Thaisa stayed awake until almost dawn.

'You won't mind the boys staying with you while I'm gone?' Jenny casually inquired one morning.

Thaisa glanced at the pair, just now subdued and interested in their new surroundings, and she thought of the rainy

days when they must be cooped up in the small studio. She had no faith in Jenny's immediate return.

'There's a park near here, isn't there?' Jenny asked. 'The boys can play there during the day and be put to bed early.'

'We'll try to get along,' said Thaisa.

That night she went out to the Little Shop to pack some of her belongings and there met Strangeley. 'Reba's gone away for a few days,' he said. Then regarding her closely: 'What's the trouble? You seem let down. The season been too much for you?'

'No — sudden visitors last night.'

'Ah, I see.'

Somewhat humorously, she told him of Jenny's pilgrimage.

'Go straight home and inform your mother to take her offspring with her when she goes husband chasing,' he advised. 'Present them as *prima facie* evidence that her man has yielded his right to the pursuit of the goddess of liberty.'

Thaisa smiled.

'Oh, little child in search of the impossible, forget all that you've ever yearned for, romance, security, love. . . .'

Her eyes suddenly misted.

' . . . For nothing lasts, Thaisa, so why care as you care? The powerful ones are those who expect nothing from life.'

She thought of Reba and her love for this man. If he were not so strongly indifferent, he might see and find something more lovely than he could believe.

He gazed at her. 'But no, you're hopelessly romantic and you'll tear yourself to pieces because of that.' Abruptly he turned on his heel and was gone.

But, in a manner, he had strengthened her. She returned

home, determined to cope with Jenny, and Jenny greeted her with the news that Paul was not well and should be kept quiet for a few days. 'He gets these attacks, but they pass all right, if we're a bit careful.'

Thaisa was relieved, and in the morning the boy was better. Jenny announced that she was leaving that afternoon. A neighbor came to call Thaisa to the telephone which they used in common. Thaisa, in five minutes, returned to Jenny's questioning. 'Who was it, Thaisa?' There was no reason known to Jenny why Jenny should not ask.

'Reba Van Valkenberg. She's been out of town and has just returned. She asked me to go to a concert with her to-day, then to her home for dinner.'

Jenny stood still, memories awakening. 'Reba Van Valkenberg?' she asked.

'Yes. The same girl whose mother you knew.' The color flooded Thaisa's face at thought of the estimable 'Mrs. O'Hara.'

'You seem thick with her.'

'We are very good friends.'

'My lady daughter! Have you told her how her mother was received at her back door?' In Jenny's voice was something outraged.

'Please, Mother, don't,' Thaisa begged. Something of the same emotion that had pierced her when Jenny first told this story touched her now.

'I've a good mind,' said Jenny, 'to seek her out and tell her.'

Something strong came up then in Thaisa. She turned to Jenny as to a stranger. 'Mother, from now on you will

keep hands off my life. There are some things I want to forget,' she said quietly.

'Houghty toighty!' But Jenny's eyes held a look of fear.

Thaisa said no more. She moved about very quietly, far removed, it seemed to Jenny, from anything she might say or do.

22

But Jenny shortly recovered her spirits. She helped prepare lunch; then she washed the dishes in the tiny room behind the screen. 'Play-house,' she said, 'but I think I'd like it for a change.'

'Peter and I enjoy it.'

Jenny looked straight at her daughter. 'You seem to me to belong to a different world; not tied up in this small place.'

'Maybe in some future . . .'

'Ah, you've learned patience then,' Jenny interrupted. 'Or what is it? You're my own child, and you're a puzzle to me. You seem so simple and so frank, and yet no one knows you.'

So she complained. Thaisa went to the window to watch the boys, who were playing in the street. They were not in mischief, though they might easily be. Already Thaisa had seen dark looks on the janitor's face. Few children ever wandered into the studio-building halls. And very evidently he did not relish the present invasion.

'Don't take it so serious,' said Jenny, coming up softly. 'They've learned pretty well to take care of themselves.'

'But in the city!'



‘Portland’s a city.’

‘I know I’m foolish to be so nervous.’

Jenny said suddenly, ‘Well, you won’t be troubled long. I’ll be back here as soon as I can get Richard weaned away from whatever’s keeping him.’

Thaisa did not answer. She was utterly unable to cope with Jenny’s viewpoint.

‘And if I were you,’ Jenny continued, ‘I’d certainly hold a tighter rein over your man. He’s not perfect, no more than any man is, though you may think so. Take no notice of his ridiculous excuses to get away. . . .’

‘But holding on doesn’t make love finer or truer.’

‘Doesn’t it? . . . You get satisfaction, though, that your bonds are being lived up to.’

‘Oh, that’s so little.’

‘Is it? Are you getting beyond common folks?’

Thaisa did not answer. Jenny waited, then broke out with a vigor that showed there still smoldered in her the wrath of the morning, ‘You’re growing like your lady grandmother.’

‘Mother, don’t say that,’ Thaisa cried then. ‘I want to live, to feel, not to evade.’

‘Eh, did your grandmother’s ice make that fear in you? Well, then, take a leaf out of my book!’

Thaisa shrank. ‘You couldn’t do that either, I see. I’m too crude, that’s it — not at all like your fine, rich friends.’ All Jenny’s outraged pride came up now. ‘No thanks — after the way I fixed things for you.’

A premonitory chill shook Thaisa. ‘What do you mean?’ she asked faintly.

‘Back there in Portland when you wandered about not knowing what ailed you. So I wrote to Peter!’

‘*You wrote to Peter!*’

‘Yes. Why not? I thought he could do for you. . . . Anyway, you weren’t easy to live with, and your father forever blaming me.’

Thaisa stood stone-still. Jenny looked at the white face before her. ‘What’s there so wrong about that? You’d said that you were going to marry him. So I wrote and told him something was wrong with you, and you were probably fretting about what had passed between you and him.’

As once before in her life, Thaisa put out her hand in an imploring gesture. ‘Don’t, Mother!’ . . . Some deep pride of her womanhood seemed to be probed by a sharp knife.

‘Now it came out all right, didn’t it?’ Jenny asked, a bit frightened. ‘. . . You’re married and happy, you say.’

But Thaisa did not answer. An element essential to her life seemed dying within her.

‘Why don’t you speak?’ Jenny demanded angrily.

Thaisa did speak, crying out: ‘*Oh, Mother, you twisted the threads!*’

But Jenny did not understand. She thought her daughter suddenly gone mad. She was aggrieved, and wondered whether she’d been a fool to tell the story. She remembered that she had warned Peter never to tell, and quite evidently he had never done so. But there was Thaisa, looking like death.

Still — she comforted herself — she had told nothing of finding the picture in Peter’s wallet. And she thought herself a model of discretion.

Thaisa sat down in a little straight chair near the window. An intolerable pain and humiliation bore her down. And through it all was the sharpness of the knowledge that Peter had not sent for her in the ardor of an unquenchable love, but because Jenny had roused his pity for a drifting girl, unable to chart her own course.

No wonder that throughout the years of his marriage he had tugged at his chains. He, of whom Myra Kenyon had said, ' . . . free, as always you would be free.'

And she — Thaisa — had taken his freedom from him. Here then lay the answer to all his struggles and dissatisfactions.

True, he had cared, back there in Ranger. But she was older now and more experienced, and she could understand how her intense romanticism had had its influence upon him.

When he left her to take up his own life, she must have become a shadowy phantom to him. Oh, always a tender feeling for the little child he had known and for the girl of a summer's playtime, but no lasting, no deep emotion.

. . . Thus intensifying, going beyond the truth of Peter, but hurt too deeply to discriminate. . . .

And then plunging into herself, coming upon submerged memories of lost adventures, lost beauties. . . . One walking with her through the woods, dancing and singing with her.

She had not known herself. A little time, leisure to think,

to understand, and she and Peter might both have been saved.

She looked about the room. Here the drama of their married life had been played. Here the struggles and the rebellions. The alienation. . . . And then, such a short time ago just before Peter's going, the reconciliation — the attempt to draw close together in a desert island of intimacy, to kindle new fires. . . . Well, the smell of sacrifice was on the hearth.

She felt the heritage of her grandmother falling upon her, but now she did not shrink, rather in truth welcomed the mantle as a shield. Ice formed within her and the resolution that life should never again touch her. Isolate, she would go her way — isolate and immune.

She rose. 'Mother,' she said quietly, 'I want to be alone. You must take the boys with you.'

'Take the boys with me! What would I do with them in New York?'

'Leave them with Aunt Sarah, if necessary.'

'Eh, you're a hard one,' Jenny cried, angered and frightened too at what her impulsive tongue had brought to pass. 'Is it because I wrote the letter?'

Thaisa put out a beseeching hand. 'I don't want to talk about it, Mother.'

But Jenny persisted, though still frightened by this white storm she had evoked. 'Why you should take on in this way simply because I fixed things for you?' She broke off as Thaisa turned away, but continued bravely: 'Peter Dagmar still cared for you. It was all just a misunderstanding.'

‘The boys are coming in; you’ll have to dress them in a hurry,’ said Thaisa. ‘I’ll call a taxi.’

‘Yes, you’re a hard one,’ Jenny repeated. ‘And I remember how tender you could be back there when the boys were born. It was as though you just showered love.’ A while before, had Jenny revealed that she had cherished such a memory, Thaisa would have been deeply touched, but now she remained unmoved.

‘Yes, you’ve a marble streak,’ Jenny plunged in again. ‘As I’ve said, you’re all soft till you get the bit in your teeth, like your lady grandmother.’

But even this did not disturb Thaisa, she who all her life had dreaded turning to stone. So Jenny went about calling the boys, hurrying them into their best clothes, packing their few belongings, her eyes warily upon Thaisa who stood so tall, so white, there near the window.

At the end: ‘Good-bye, Thaisa. . . .’

‘Good-bye, Mother. I shall be glad if you will say nothing of this to Peter, when you see him in New York.’

‘I’ve had enough of talk,’ Jenny returned shortly. She was more impressed by this white-faced daughter than ever before in her life. Also, she felt the wind of a bitter tragedy, and Jenny, for the moment, was at a loss, helpless.

Reba and Strangeley were kind, for they saw that Thaisa had been deeply hurt. Reba came to the studio and found Thaisa packing. ‘What’s this?’ she cried.

‘I’m going away.’

‘Thaisa, something has gone terribly wrong. Let me help.’

‘No one can help, Reba.’

‘See here, Thaisa, let’s you and I run away — to Europe — anywhere.’

‘You’re kind, Reba, but I’m going away alone.’

Reba stood silent. ‘If I can help in any way, will you let me know?’

‘I will let you know.’

Reba kissed Thaisa’s pale cheek. Then, half blinded by tears, she left the studio, and went down a side street. So she missed Strangeley, also calling on Thaisa.

He stood for a moment looking at her as she remained, white and motionless, standing in the place Reba had left her.

‘I came to tell you that I can get you in with the new Stock Theatre on the North Side, Thaisa,’ he began. ‘Professionals!’

‘Thank you, but I’m going away.’

‘Alone?’

‘Yes. I want to be quite alone.’

‘I see. Well, I am glad you are doing this. But you will return into the world some day, and then . . .’ He broke off, put out his hand and then he, too, was gone.

In the night, the place, sharp and clear, where she might hide away from the world and from life, stood revealed to her. This was the abandoned shack in Ranger. Here she would be left quite alone. She felt confident that Richard and Jenny would not return to Portland.

The day she left Chicago, a letter came from Peter saying

that Jenny had arrived in New York with the two boys; that Richard, since his family had descended upon him, had decided to remain in New York. As for himself, all was going well. He had made several good contacts and, until Jenny had come upon the scene, he and Richard had been busy and happy.

Thaisa prepared herself to write to him — not an answer to his letter, but a statement of her decision. In a day she was ready, calm and strong for her task.

She told him that she was going away — leaving him — to find freedom, because the end of their life together had come. She believed that their marriage should never have been, and she knew he would agree with her. The fact that — before his going — they had seemed to recapture their first thrills did not alter this truth. She saw now that their marriage had been a mistake. Solitude was now the boon she most craved, and this he could make it possible for her to have if he would make no attempt to seek her out. She had sufficient money for her simple needs for some time to come, and she reiterated that the kindest act on his part was to let her go out of his life, with no effort to find and discuss any future. She had asked the janitor of the studio-building to communicate directly with Peter in New York, as to his wishes regarding what should be done about the little apartment.

A definite letter, she felt, and while for a time he might feel hurt, perhaps angered, by her stand, still deep in his heart there would be relief. But two days later, she received a telegram. He could not understand this sudden decision. He had closely questioned Jenny, but Jenny too was ignorant

of anything that might have caused this change. He meant to return at once to Chicago — or would she not come on to New York so they might talk things out?

Talk things out! She could see him, depressed because he felt that she was unhappy. He had always wanted to be kind. And yet — she reminded herself — Peter caught! . . . Peter, who had wanted to go free, and still had been caught!

She answered him so definitely that he must accept the truth that all had ended between them. His pride alone, she felt, would not allow him further to attempt to dissuade her from carrying out her plans. She meant to write to Richard, but she depended on Peter to still any concern Richard might feel, even to the point of admitting the definite separation. ‘Assure him,’ she told Peter, ‘that I am well provided for — as I am — and that the kindest act would be to let me have my way.’

To Richard, she revealed her intense desire to be left alone, to go her own way, with no intrusion into her life. ‘I have proved,’ she finished, ‘that I can take care of myself. And I promise you that if ever real need should arise, I will get in touch with you at once. I want to be left alone more than I have ever wanted anything in my life. Father, you will understand.’

To Jenny, in care of Aunt Sarah, she wrote that she was going away for a rest. She charged again that what had passed between them was never to be spoken of to Peter, to Richard.

And so she turned her back on life.

PART FIVE

I

ON A hot day in July she reached Beasley, the town north of Ranger, to discover that the electric street car had been discontinued. She stood and gazed about. As far as she could see, there appeared no sign of life. Small valise in hand, she commenced her long walk. The valley through which she passed seemed lifeless, and here and there hop fields, from which the posts and wires had been razed, lay bleak and drab. . . . When the sun was setting, she reached the shack.

She pushed through the broken gate and went down the hard dirt walk until she came to the steps where so often she and Peter had sat and talked of their love story. Now all was wild solitude. To the left was what had been once a large wheat field, but evidently the renting farmer had long since gone from the red house a mile away. . . . The twittering birds lent now the only note of life.

After a time she rose and tried the front door. It opened to her hand, and she entered and stood in the large room with its conglomerate and shabby furniture, its worn rug and wooden chairs.

She walked to the twins' room and looked about. Neglected — dust over everything — but little changed. It was all as she remembered, even to the rusty gun — standing in one corner — which Richard had used occasionally in a hunt

for rabbits. What tenants there had been apparently had left no marks of their own upon the place.

She removed her hat, found a broom and duster and went to work. As she swept, she seemed to glimpse two young figures playing there in the road — two young figures going through the deep and fragrant woods. She heard the tinkle of guitars and singing voices. But it was all of memory and of no substance.

She finished cleaning the house and went to sit on the steps, from where she could look off into the rapidly falling night. Desolate and barren, the country stretched all about her. In the road, a narrow rut ran. She supposed old Benjamin, the postman, still came by twice a week in his rickety cart.

He went through Ranger, she recalled, on to Armitage, and then back again to Beasley. He was a kindly old man, with thick, white hair and bent shoulders, and he had called her Mis' Thaisa. During Peter's visit he had been ill, and one of the neighboring farm boys had brought the mail.

So she let her thoughts wander idly until night came. Then she went indoors, found the old lamp on a shelf in the kitchen, and lit it, making a mental note that she must obtain kerosene and a supply of wicks.

And that night for the first time since Jenny's story, she slept long and dreamlessly.

2

Hour by hour, time crept by. Arousing herself one day, Thaisa realized that, though an eternity seemed to

have been lived by her since Peter's going, only one month had elapsed.

One month to come from a full experience of life to this desolate hiding place — this refuge where life could never again find her. Days with no planning toward any future. . . .

By inquiry of old Benjamin, she found a farm one mile beyond the empty MacFarland place, where she made arrangements to buy milk and eggs and occasionally fresh bread baked by Mrs. Morrison, the farmer's wife. Instinctively, Thaisa disliked this woman's cold, curious eyes, but on the surface she was wholly disinterested.

These people, middle-aged and arid, had not known her father, but had heard him spoken of, so they called her Worthington, and she did not take the trouble to put them right.

One truth that she learned disturbed her slightly. Ian came here perhaps twice a year to look over his aunt's farm — usually in spring and fall. But here again she stilled her heart. For what — since she had repudiated life — could Ian matter to her now?

On her old bookshelf, she found her Shakespeare and near by a book of Peter's: Nietzsche's 'Zarathustra.' She read these books as she sat in the sun in an old rocking-chair which she had salvaged from a gully that ran in back of the house. Here she had found traces of tenants and their odd ways, and had been compelled to amend her first thought that no debris had been left. She spent two days clearing out the gully and burning the rubbish.

But she did not mind the work. To keep busy with her

hands was surcease, so that her mind did not run on and on. Only at night did the glacial mood melt somewhat. Tears would come scaldingly to her eyes.

But she determined to conquer this weakness. Softness should not touch her again, ever. She had removed herself from everything that might hurt. And she had been hurt sufficiently. Now all was finished.

The long, long days! She marked their going on a calendar that old Benjamin had brought to her. Sunday, church bells ringing. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, all alike in quiet, uninterrupted hours from dawn, when she rose, till sunset, with color dripping over field and far mountain tops.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the day like a ship, once dedicated to Peter. Now, on this day her solitude was occasionally broken by the passing of a farmer's wagon on the way to town.

Automatically, she would raise her hand to return a greeting, but never did she walk toward the road where she might be drawn into conversation — be the subject of conjecture.

Once she said aloud: 'I have been here forever,' and the sound of her voice frightened her. But she had, she found, been in her isolation just six weeks.

Six weeks — and an eternity stretched before her. She looked about for work with which to occupy her days. Since her time, the rough plastered walls had been smoothed down and an attempt made at papering. But this paper was faded and falling. She thought of its renewal as something to make the hours less leaden in their passing.

After she had removed all the fallen paper, she walked one day to Beasley and bought a new stock at the country store.

And while paying for her purchase and wondering how possibly she could carry it the intervening miles, she decided to wait for Benjamin.

When he came, she put the paper and other staples into his cart and rode back to the shack. 'If there's anything I can ever do for you, let me know, Mis' Thaisa,' Benjamin said, as he was departing. Never did he ask her any questions, and she was grateful for his sensitive reticence. He too was alone, as was she. No kin and perhaps no close friends. He understood.

She went to her paper hanging. A hard, puzzling job. And not good work when finished. But an air of freshness was in the place; the clusters of old fashioned flowers lent an air of quiet cheer.

This task finished, she spent hours wandering through the woods. The cathedral silence, the great trees, the murmuring streams seemed all to welcome her back. But her thoughts went on beyond them.

She thought of Jenny — Jenny a rebel, desiring passion and color. Thaisa had a swift recollection of her when in Manchester, hating the formality of the Worthington life, fighting her battles to hold Richard. . . . Jenny, making her patterns, using the material that best suited her own purposes.

And Richard, that other from whom she had sprung. A memory of the Irish moors and the walk in the rain came to her. . . . The times he had sung. She touched all these spiritual realities. The hunger of her childhood, the physical wants were as nothing. The beauty of the walk in the rain and the song had meant all to her.

She thought she would like to see Richard; then quickly she suppressed this desire. She would go her way alone.

One day a dilapidated pony cart approached the shack, and the driver looking about, hesitant, finally decided to stop. Thaisa from her front door saw a woman descend and come up the path carrying a small valise.

As the visitor neared, Thaisa felt the impulse to run, but she forced herself to wait. A thin, middle-aged woman spoke pleasantly: 'Oh, may I come in for a moment? I lost my way and have driven miles, I think, over deserted roads; scarcely a house in sight.'

Thaisa opened the door, and the woman entered and seated herself in a chair. 'I'm selling silk scarves, embroidered center pieces and shell-stitch bandings,' she said. 'And I've seen two farmers' wives today!'

'I'll make you a cup of tea,' said Thaisa.

When she returned with her tray, the visitor drank the tea eagerly, and between bites of small cakes, exploited her wares.

'Perhaps you'd like something on this order,' she pursued, and from a compartment in her valise, she produced a scarf. 'Hand-woven,' she explained. 'Everybody's wild about them.'

It was lovely. 'I'll take the scarf, if it isn't too expensive,' Thaisa agreed.

'You'll never be sorry; two dollars.'

Thaisa counted out the money. Afterwards she watched the woman go down the path, climb into the decrepit buggy with the patient old horse standing head down, and drive off, her white veil flying behind her in the wind.

Thaisa picked up the scarf. Its glowing colors of orange and blue with bands of black were exquisite. And as she stood, she thought of Madam Lester and her colors. She lost herself in a maze of conjecture. If she had not gone to Madam Lester's and then run from the position, she would never have heard Jenny's story about the back-door episode. . . . Richard in the drawing room of the Michigan Avenue mansion — Jenny a suppliant in the kitchen.

And it was the memory of that humiliating experience that later, in comparison with Thaisa's warm friendship with Reba Van Valkenburg, had aroused Jenny's ire and caused her to tell the truth of the letter to Peter. And on and on. . . .

But it was all useless, going through the tangle. There was no straightening such knotted skeins.

3

September had come, with its lovely nights. It was two months since Thaisa had said good-bye to Peter. And yet now — growing to be part of her environment — time seemed not a matter of weeks, of months, but of cycles of eternity.

. . . Two months. And now material matters were beginning to press. Her money was running low. But she would not go forth from her hiding place into the world of men and women again — not if starvation faced her.

Her eye fell upon the woven scarf she had bought from the pleasant saleswoman. And as she gazed, memory of the old tapestry came to her, and how she had loved that marvel

of design and color. . . . The dancing youth, uncaring, free. . . . To take threads, to weave a little here, a little there. . . .

A loom. . . . To weave. . . .

So she wrote to Reba. She was, she told her friend, staying in her old home and here she wished to remain undisturbed. To Reba's love, loyalty and discretion, she left the matter of absolute secrecy. Not even Peter, she confessed, knew her hiding place.

She was writing now to ask if Reba would look into the matter of the cost of a small loom; also see if it were possible for one to learn anything of the art of weaving from a book of instructions.

So sure of Reba's understanding was she that she waited in calm certainty that her problem for work and new activity would be answered.

And in a short time Reba answered. She did completely understand, and she was glad that Thaisa was free to herself — as always she should have been free. And never to any other soul would she reveal the identity of that far-away place.

She herself was not aboundingly happy. If a loom for her would still her restlessness, then she would go in for the craft of weaving. She took it that Thaisa was done with love, but fulfillment with disillusion seemed better than to go with a hidden craving for all of knowledge.

She had heard that Peter had been back to Chicago but not permanently — merely to sell his furniture — and she had not seen him. There had been no love lost between them; let it go at that.

Strangeley, she finished casually, as though he had no connection with her heart-cry in the letter, was still in New York. Often he dropped short, brilliant letters to her. Bertram Lewis hadn't opened the Little Theatre again, but probably intended to go on with some interest along the same lines. Her mother was still puttering clumsily with philanthropy, and her father played with his butterflies. 'I am sending the loom, Thaisa,' she finished, 'as a gift. With all my heart I wish to do this. Please do not be proud, but accept the gift with my love.'

Thaisa held the letter a long time. Then, bringing herself from contemplation of the past into her present, she put the missive away in a small box on her dresser. Tomorrow she would write, thanking Reba for her great generosity, and accepting the gift.

The loom, of course, would have to be brought from Portland. She pondered as to ways and means of carriage to the shack, and then she thought of Morrison, the Scotch farmer. She knew that he drove into the city twice a month on business; perhaps he would call at the express office for her loom.

So she started out one morning to interview him. As she went, she realized that she hesitated about asking this favor of old Morrison. Neither he nor his wife had yet become friendly; not that she desired friendship, but she felt that their continued aloof coldness held suspicion.

Although their Scotch efficiency had made their farm a paying one where others had failed, Thaisa recognized them as narrow and bigoted, though Morrison seemed to possess a primitive sense of justice. Not kindness, but justice. She

had heard him on one of her calls berate a visitor, a farmer from another township, for bad treatment of a Mexican employed in a hop yard. 'It don't matter what he did,' — she remembered the words — 'he's a sort of human being, and you've got to understand that in dealing with him and his kind.'

She walked on slowly. The day was mild, and as she went by the woods, rich and heavy fragrances were borne to her by soft winds. She breathed deeply, feeling herself lifted by the color and movement about her — liberated too. Free, so that neither happiness nor pain could reach her again — as though she had entered a convent.

She passed the old MacFarland place. She paused and seemed again to hear the tinkle of the Mexican guitars, feel the glow of the old furnaces, and for a second a mounting emotion stole over her.

Irritated at this sudden flare-up of memory when she thought herself immune to all things, she went on quickly. And then impelled she knew not by what instinct, she looked up. A thin spiral of smoke floated above; she saw that it came from a chimney on the MacFarland house. Some one was cooking a meal.

Frightened now, like some wild creature afraid of people, she began to run, and as she went she heard a door open and some one come down the path. She ran faster then, for in a moment there was the sound of pursuing feet; and she knew Ian had returned, as he usually did in the fall.

But her speed was useless. The footsteps caught up with her; a voice sounded near her: 'Thaisa! Thaisa!'

She stopped, her heart hammering in her ears. Her body

quivered with weakness, and nowhere in that wide and deserted road was there an object against which she might lean for support. . . . An arm stole about her; she felt the strength of a lean and active body, and for a second she relaxed.

Then she stood away. She looked up and cried, 'Ian!'

'And you, *Thaisa*! I felt you near and came to the window.'

He led her back down the road, in through the gate and up to the porch. She sank into a chair that he pulled forward for her and there remained in silence. . . .

'Just rest, *Thaisa*,' he said, and great tenderness was in his voice. 'I will bring you something hot to drink.'

He went away but soon returned with coffee, which she drank, feeling instantly revived. He drew a chair close beside her and waited quietly until she put her cup down on the porch ledge.

'And so we come together again, *Thaisa*,' he said at last.

She looked at him. He had changed; the golden youth to which so instinctively she had given response was gone; but now the fine maturity that spoke from him reached out to touch her.

For a second she let memory return him fully to her. . . . The thick hair, the deep-set eyes that just now were regarding her so closely and with such complete understanding; the long, firm hands — so strong — almost articulate in their movements.

She knew she must speak. '. . . Have you just come here!' she asked.

'A day or so ago. On business for my aunt. She is trying

to sell the farm. This morning I meant to drive by your place — to remember. . . .’

The color rose hotly to her face.

‘You went away and married — I know that much of you,’ he continued. ‘Wasn’t it all very sudden?’

She nodded.

‘But you have returned. . . . Thaisa, tell me, are you alone?’

‘Yes.’

‘You have been hurt. . . .’ His hand reached out to touch hers. The soft air about them, the silence seemed to enclose them. But at last Thaisa recalled herself. She rose, saying she must be on her way, and stood a moment looking down the broken pathway out to the road.

‘Thaisa,’ he asked, ‘how long shall you be here?’

She answered directly. ‘I am living alone in the old place and I wish to remain alone.’

‘You mean you’d rather I’d stay away, Thaisa?’

‘I do mean that.’

She started away but was stopped by his peremptory: ‘Thaisa, do you think I shall let you go now?’

His voice touched her, quivering into her heart as so often it had quivered when they wandered through the woods together. Then she had not known that this emotion had meant love and all that love implies; for she had been very young and groping, vastly puzzled by life and its assaults upon her.

Now she understood, but even in the ecstasy of enlightenment, she brought strength to bear the tide back. She remembered that love, for all its allure, all its promise of

beauty, inevitably failed. And never again would she allow its song to call to her heart. She had put herself aside from life and now she stood very straight away from Ian.

‘I am going back to my little house,’ she said coldly, ‘and you must not ever come seeking me. For I am finished.’

‘Finished! You have not yet begun, Thaisa.’

‘Finished — finished with all that can be between a man and a woman. I’ll never be caught again.’

So she walked away from him, down the sagging steps and out into the road. And though his eyes followed hers with a hurt and stricken look in them, she was not deterred by the knowledge that this was so.

And forgetting her errand to the Morrison farm, she turned and walked straight back to her lonely shack.

For all the real joy Ian’s return had given her, Thaisa was determined that if he came seeking her, she would go away, even if this meant a stealthy leaving in the night. But he did not come. And the time passed and she began to feel secure that he was gone.

4

Then one late September day, when rose and mauve colors lay in the sky, she walked through the woods again and, coming to a little brook that she had always loved, there she saw Ian standing.

She paused, looked about for escape, but he stepped near her, put his hand on hers and quieted her.

‘I have waited here every day,’ he told her, ‘knowing that

sooner or later you too would come. We both loved this place, you remember, Thaisa.'

'But there is nothing to be gained by our seeing each other.'

'Isn't there? . . . But that I don't admit.'

She shook her head. 'It's of no use, Ian.'

'Thaisa, you cannot shut yourself away like this. Aren't there those who care what you do?'

To this question she gave no answer. 'I ask little, Thaisa. But to know that you are here within reach and will not let me see you! . . .'

'I am sorry.'

'Let me be your friend. All I ask is to be near you, to help you in any way.'

She searched into his ardent face. He was sincere and strong, and she knew that now in truth he would ask nothing that she could not give.

' . . . If you should come, you won't be hurt if I don't talk sometimes, or even if I should go away from you? ' she asked at last.

'I shall not be hurt nor even curious, Thaisa.'

So she said he might come to the shack. He drove over in an open car, the noise of which drew her to the window. And he came inside and stayed an hour. When he left, a shaft of loneliness struck her, so that when two days later he again appeared, she felt a momentary glowing warmth.

This time, finding her more responsive, he told her something of himself. He was junior member of a San Francisco firm of engineers and he had been trusted with a few very

worth-while jobs. Thaisa recalled that Richard had spoken of Ian's being on the road to making himself famous. There was force and quality in him.

'I've had a strenuous year, and I've asked for a further leave of absence,' he finished, and he turned to her with a searching look. But Thaisa moved her eyes away from his and her lips closed firmly together.

She too had known ambitions, but even these she had put aside. Still Ian's ambitions stirred her. While he remained impersonal, she encouraged him to go on.

For, as he sat near her in these lovely autumn days, despite her resolute turning from life, he awakened her. His deep voice unlocked memories of other days when he and she had played together. And his ardent manner of describing far lands brought back thoughts of an earlier time when, distraught and questioning, she had walked through the woods with him and vibrated to the glorious pictures of life he drew for her.

But always there was ice in the face she turned toward him. She would not allow him again to enter her heart.

Still he came. And when a card from an express office arrived, saying that Thaisa's loom had been delivered in Portland, Ian insisted upon driving to the city to procure the crate.

He started early one day, and late in the afternoon returned, the great awkward package tied behind the car.

Together they lifted the loom into the house, uncovered it and set it near the east window in the large room. Reba had sent a thick book of instructions and a great deal of raw material, both wool and silk.

‘Is all this just for recreation?’ Ian asked.

‘At first, while I learn. In time I may make enough, if I can open a market, to support myself. I need little.’

‘Thaisa!’ he cried, and stopped. But there was in his voice such deep and exquisite desire to serve her that she turned quickly away and went out through the open door, down the road and out of his straining sight.

And though he waited until night came on, Thaisa did not return.

5

In time, after concentrated study of the book of directions, Thaisa understood fairly well the first rudiments of her new art, and when Ian appeared, her eyes continued bright and interested.

As though there had been no tension between them, she began to talk. ‘The wind has been from the south,’ she said, ‘and it has rained for days. I’ve stayed at my loom.’

‘It rained at my place too,’ he said, laughing at her.

‘Oh, of course. . . .’

‘So you see you are one with me,’ he went on, but she would not let him continue. She showed him what she had accomplished with her wools. ‘In time I’ll have a small rug woven,’ she said, ‘and for colors, I’ll choose lavender and gold.’

‘You look today,’ he told her, ‘like the Thaisa who dared me to wrest the ball from her.’

She smiled, but still she would not enter that path of personalities. ‘See how easy it really is. . . .’ She mounted the platform before the loom and with her feet on the treadles

moved her threads back and forth, slowly throwing the large shuttle from end to end.

‘Wonderful,’ he exclaimed, looking at her as at an exquisite picture. After a pause: ‘But really you’ve been sticking too close to this work, Thaisa. Let’s take a walk.’

She took down her hat and sweater and went with him into the lovely cool day. They turned toward the woods. The sweet, moist air touched their faces as they entered the green paths.

Suddenly they began to talk as they had talked when young and free and wandering hand in hand. Thaisa remembered that, more than anything else, she had wanted songs and high winds. Laughter, she had believed, was an inside self. She had even thought it was the only sound that would go on living.

‘Beauty is man’s greatest heritage,’ said Ian. ‘Do you remember we thought man a blasphemer when he didn’t believe in this heritage.’

‘You did; you were far beyond me,’ she said.

‘No. . . . Thaisa, you wanted to act at one time. I remember how you spoke Shakespeare’s lines:

— ‘Daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes
Or Cytherea’s breath.’

She nodded. ‘These woods seemed then to be what Shakespeare meant. But always I endowed all things with

the beauty I craved.' She paused. 'I did play awhile in a Little Theatre. But nothing has been of importance.'

Compassion was in his face. 'But you will have your chance, I know that, Thaisa.'

'It doesn't matter, truly, Ian.'

They walked on, the brushwood soft beneath their feet. 'I feel now that I shall never want to act again,' she said. 'Sometimes I want to write, but then all art is allied.'

'Yes, if you're creative and denied, sometimes you do turn to another expression, or to religion perhaps, some kind of self-protection.'

'If one could be like a child living near the heart of things — the meaning.' She stopped and he waited. 'The child has no understanding of abnormality, deformity, pain. I remember once trying to elicit small Richard's pity for a crippled woman, but his face was a cold, white blank. "I don't like broken ladies," he said.'

Ian smiled and still waited. 'The days pass, and nothing seems greatly to count. Is that ever the way with you, Ian?'

'Sometimes. We know all experience repeats itself from age to age. And often you feel there's nothing new for you to give, or to perceive.'

'Yes, that is true. Back there in Chicago there was a time of wandering for me. . . . Lectures by a Brahmin. . . . He was very good and something he said about loving one's self — a great self-respect — stayed with me for a long time.'

'There are all kinds of schools and ideas, and nothing really to hold to unless it's some simple thing, so simple it eludes you,' she finished.

'After all, isn't it really what answers for the individual?'

She moved closer to him, drawn irresistibly because he had given her a deep understanding. 'Oh, Ian, yes; only what you hew out for yourself is wholly true for you.'

But the glow faded. 'It's all like feeling into echoes. . . .'

'Dear Thaisa,' he cried, and drew her to him. She stood, sinking in his embrace. 'Thaisa, you cannot put yourself away from life — you so richly endowed.'

But memory returned to her. She looked about at the tall and majestic trees near by, the brook purling its way over the smooth stones, the yellow and springing turf beneath her feet, and sadness once again crept upon her. 'I am done with all that would take me back into the stream,' she said.

'But what if you have known pain, Thaisa? That is the common lot!'

'Yes, the common lot, I know. Then I am weak, and terribly afraid. I don't want to experience life ever again.'

He held her against any strength of hers to escape. 'You weak, Thaisa? No! And if you are, come with me and together we will face the world.'

But she did not respond.

'I do not remember you as hiding from realities,' he went on.

'No, realities are of truth,' she answered, 'and I have not hidden from realities.'

'Then come with me into the reality of our love. Thaisa, something happened to you. You turned away from me, and I never understood why. You need not tell me — only take my love, all that I am. . . . Oh, my darling, it could all be such an adventure for us!'

Now he touched even the frozen places, and she looked

at him, her eyes deepening to black. Then she said sadly, 'But it is all too late, Ian. The terrible part of life is that understandings do come too late.'

'No — no! We will make no promises. Only while we are together in this place, let us believe the past is dead. Thaisa, just pretend that the things you once dreamed are true.'

But she did not answer. Life had hurt her too deeply for any new adjustment. She was done with life.

6

Now, when she thought of Peter, it was as though he had crept like a shadow into her life and had gone like one. Three months, and she had heard nothing from him. She was intensely relieved that he had not tried to seek her out.

She was growing skilful with her loom craft. But now she was not so well. Even in the clear, light air, the long walks in the woods, she was not revived. She grew thinner and her health constantly poorer.

Was death, she wondered, to be the answer to all her pain? She thought she did not care greatly if this were true. Then, one day, as she sat at her loom, weaving back and forth, the long period of her mental and physical strain seemed to come to a focus. A darkness fell upon her and she felt suffocated.

She rose with difficulty and groped her way to the open door. There she leaned against the jamb, her dizziness making all objects whirl through the blackness. . . . She knew that Ian was coming — was about due — and when at last

she heard the sound of his car and saw his tall form coming hastily up the path, she knew immeasurable relief.

Ian lifted her, carried her and put her upon her small white bed. He bathed her temples and prepared hot tea for her, holding the cup to her lips with one hand, while with the other he still supported her body. She felt his strength entering into her.

Soon a warmth stole through her. And because, on his face, there lay an expression of great concern for her, she reached out her fingers and touched his very lightly; but a flame, deep and glowing, sprang into his eyes.

‘You are better?’ he asked and took no slightest advantage of her seeking fingers.

After a time, she was steadier. With Ian’s help, she sat up and walked out into the main room, going toward her loom.

But he followed and caught her hands. ‘Not again today, dear.’ And he left her, standing indecisive, while he went outdoors, returning in a moment with some object that he hid from her.

‘What have you there?’ she asked.

Then he revealed a treasure—a small cage in which hopped a golden bird, with black-tipped wings. Carefully, Ian placed the cage on the table near the window.

‘Captive, but a singer,’ said Ian.

The words, for a second, awakened Thaisa. She looked from the little bird to Ian, and she thought: ‘How strong this man is!’—with a strength that could endure all things.

And then she remembered that the promise had never reached fulfillment. And that her faith was dead.

Ian, seeing that to talk now was useless, went quietly away.

7

The little bird was companion to her, breaking with his music the long silences. Soon he answered her calls and came hopping to her finger. As she worked at her loom, he sang. She called him Don.

At this period, she was applying herself to the one object of her life — perfecting herself in her weaving, and finding that every day her skill increased.

But one day she went with Ian for a ride in his old car. Now she was glad to go. Not yet was she wholly attuned to the deadly solitude that pressed upon her in the little house. For a moment as they went, the world stretched out hands to her again. But fear turned her from that beckoning.

Ian turned to her. ‘Oh, Thaisa,’ he cried, ‘the gods that are, grant me time and opportunity to show you how precious you are to me! To show you that nothing but you can ever count greatly in my life!’

For a second, she drew closer to him. ‘Tell me, Thaisa,’ he went on, ‘did you not see my love and answer it before he came — after he had gone?’

She answered him directly: ‘Yes; but I was stupid and filled with confusion. And, too, Peter had always been part of my life — part of my destiny, I believed.’

‘Still you were torn, I realized that. But it didn’t seem true to me when I heard you had gone. We seemed so to belong to each other, I thought you understood and I never wanted to frighten you by binding words. And yet, after I left Ranger, I tore up a dozen letters, asking you to marry

me, before one suited me. Before I mailed it, my aunt wrote that you had gone away to be married.'

The color left her face. This thwarting had all been so cruel. Quick to feel her every mood, he went on. 'But it's not too late, for all the years we've been apart, and as soon as we're married, we'll go to France and England. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Thaisa?'

'I have never forgotten places in England.'

'We'd visit your old home; then on leisurely through France — everywhere our desires might lead us.'

She moved uneasily. He was calling to her — to take her back into the current, the current that might rise and push her down once more to blinding depths. She must resist. . . . She would resist with all her strength.

'There are practicalities, Thaisa. You must set about freeing yourself, so that we can be together. You've been apart from your husband nearly four months. . . .'

'Four months!'

'Yes, you came here early in July, you tell me. Now it is the end of October.'

'Only four months!' It was true, she saw. But had he said four years, she would, for the moment, have accepted his word. Only four months since Peter had gaily ridden away! Four months since Jenny had come with her story of a thoughtless interference — Jenny who had been blind to all but her own purpose.

'Surely you can sue on the ground of desertion, no matter what the true cause of the separation, Thaisa. We shall have to wait — a year perhaps — before we can marry. But what is a year when we think of the future?'

She shrank away from him. 'I can't. . . . I can't.'

'You mean you don't want — divorce?'

'I am divorced. . . . Peter and I are done with each other forever.'

'But that kind of feeling isn't enough, Thaisa beloved. You must go on, get a legal separation, even though the whole thing may be unpleasant.'

To this she gave no reply, and they rode on until at last she said: 'I think I'd like to go home now, Ian.'

Immediately he turned. When they reached her door, he jumped down and lifted her out of the car.

They stood for a moment before he released her. Then: 'I must return to San Francisco for a while, Thaisa. My firm has written to me that they can give me no more time. But I shall come back whenever you need me. You will write?'

She nodded.

'There is a lawyer in Portland who has always taken care of my aunt's affairs. Shall I send you a note so you may go in to see him?'

'No — no, not yet, Ian. Not yet. I will write to you.'

8

Yes, she knew that all was ended as far as Peter went. It was enough, that in her soul she had severed that marriage bond. What legal dis severance could make the separation more complete, more final? Of what necessity to go through the horror of law and court?

Only that she might take the plunge again into life — that

plunge from which in terror and bitterness she shrank. So, unless some day Peter should ask for this kind of release, she would let matters ride as they were.

With Ian not near to combat these thoughts, she could wholly yield to them. She loved him, not with the love that once she could have given to him, but with such emotion as could pierce her lethargy. But he must not break through this protection she had flung up about herself. Of that she was determined.

For he would bring her into the glaring light again. And here, in her retreat, she was safe. A bitter, hard security surrounded her. A desolate waste of one day following another slowly, tolling one minute to the next—and no meaning anywhere. But she would not risk leaving her shelter.

She saw no newspaper. . . . One day when she walked to the Morrison farmhouse for her milk and eggs, Mrs. Morrison told her that America was in the war. . . . War! Peter and her father would be in that war. Adventure would beckon them with compelling finger. Jenny after all would lose her hold, but Jennie would not go under. She had the will to live strongly. If she could not follow on, she could wait, making her plans for the future.

In the daylight hours now, Thaisa sat at her loom, weaving, more and more adeptly. Then scarcely had the light gone from the sky before she was lying in her bed, her eyes following through the small window the play of fading colors, crimson, yellow, purple.

When memories came, she pushed them from her. She was learning to make her mind a void over which thoughts passed like a cloud—passed but did not touch.

Ian wrote, a strong letter, almost a demanding one. Separated from her, he knew the ardent pull of desire for her. More and more he wished to take her from the desolate place she had chosen for herself and bring her once again into the world.

She was young, he reminded her, and she could not bury herself from life. She could not hide herself away from his love; for it would search her out, compel her, despite all. Again he told her of what might be in store for them both: travel in far lands; the search for beauties dreamed of. Privations perhaps at times, in places to which his pioneering work would take him; but much compensation because, after all, they would be together.

He went on painting pictures for her, calling to her, until as she read, her heart turned and twisted in her breast. . . . Till she rose and went from her loom out into the chill day, ran toward the road and stood watching the path adown which he would take her — into life and living again.

. . . Then back again, weaving. Colors bright and shining. Designs emerging. All the time feeling his hand upon her own. Hearing his voice in the accents she loved.

. . . At last, the realization that it all came too late. For she could not give him what in all fairness, in all beauty, he should have from her. She had lost the capacity to look up — to see the stars; she was afraid, distrustful, unwilling to ford the stream with him.

Writhing in her misery, she felt that never again could she emerge into the sun — into the battle. Here was her life, isolate, lonely, but secure from the ravening wolves that beset men when blindly they take on bonds.

Weakened, worn down, trembling and scarcely able to see through her blinding tears, catching glimpses of the paradise that might be for her, but knowing herself helpless to roll the burden from her soul, she went to her small table, and drawing paper and pen, answered his letter.

When he had finished reading what she had written, he must know that her decision was not to be broken. Even though he read the anguish with which she yielded all hope, all possibility of participation in life, he would, she felt sure, not again come seeking her.

And the letter sent, given into old Benjamin's care, she felt the last tie broken.

9

Now her funds were almost exhausted. One day, unwillingly and with the mien of one emerging into the light after cellar-darkness, she went to Portland, carrying her loom work with her.

Once in the city, in the world of hurrying men and women, she felt an alien, a solitary, coming to a strange land. Fortunate she felt herself, that the first store to which she offered her wares accepted them, and feeling that their loveliness would attract, ordered more from her.

Not elated, only relieved, she hastened to her train. Benjamin had promised to wait for her in Beasley and carry her on to Ranger. And as she alighted from the train, she saw him seated in his cart, waiting for her.

Benjamin, after his pleasant greeting, started off. He

avoided a rut in the bad road and cut inadvertently into another, which made the old horse stumble. Thaisa, thrown to one side of the cart, righted herself with some difficulty. A queer throb touched her.

‘Are you hurt, Mis’ Thaisa?’ Benjamin inquired, stopping the cart and looking at her with concern.

‘No.’ But she felt faint and sick.

They went on then. Carefully he selected the better part of the road and at last, greatly to her relief, they reached the shack.

‘You’re still white,’ Benjamin said. ‘Can I do anything?’

‘No, thank you. I’ll be quite all right after I’ve rested a bit.’

So the old man went on. Thaisa lay down and fell into a deep sleep. When she awoke, she felt rested. She went into the kitchen, greeted Don and made her frugal supper of bread and milk, first setting her table daintily — recalling how often she had watched her grandmother set her tray for a solitary tea. Fine linen — Thaisa had only cotton, but snow-white — cup and saucer, polished glass and silverware, and in a small vase one tiny wax flower that had been left in the shack.

Afterwards she washed up, threw a shawl over her shoulders and, carrying Don with her, went outdoors. She placed the bird’s cage on a tree branch and sat down on the steps to watch the sun go down. Ripples of color ever changing, darting across the breast of the sky like the butterflies that Reba’s father loved.

Quiet was spread over all; no sound save Don’s trills and

the answering calls of free birds. The day had been a trying one for her, and now back in her place, she felt a touch of soft peace.

She sat very still, alone in her world. . . . Very still, gazing out upon the quickly departing day. Clear color now, the butterflies melting into long fingers of pearl, interwoven by a ribbon of blue and golden snow clouds.

She sat on the steps of the old shack, a speck in the large and open world about her—alone, set aside, never to be awakened to deep living again.

. . . Then all at once terrifyingly feeling herself the same tiny speck, but a means also, and—oh, God!—with a throb of intense rejection—of being a vessel slowly filling—a container.

Her head went down to her knees. In the stillness, she waited.

Yes, within her again, as in the afternoon, a movement like the fluttering of a bird's wing; like the fluttering of Don's wing in his barred cage. . . .

She waited, gazing out into the west again, compelling herself to deep and slow rhythmic breaths.

. . . And waited!

Then again the stirring—but stronger—of purpose, compelling to surrender that part of her which wildly denied, which pushed aside belief in this possibility.

Suddenly she rose, ran into the road, stood with arms out-thrust before her, hands cupped and up, not to receive, but in a wild supplication that she was not thus to be caught again and thrown back into confusion.

She thought then, in her agony, to walk and to come to

some place in this, her forsaken world, where an end might be — an end to herself, to all consciousness.

. . . And madly to run from an invader that she knew — even as she went toward the setting sun — she could never escape. . . . That for always would accompany her, be of her life. . . .

This day — another day of her freedom, her isolation — this day discovering that she was repository for Peter's child.

Peter's child.

After a time, she walked back to the shack. She was able faintly to greet Don, who chirruped lustily; but in a moment, with the appalling significance of her discovery falling full upon her, wild sobs tore at her throat. Then suddenly she was quiet. Perhaps in her travail, death would come upon her.

. . . Death and release.

IO

The next morning she woke on a note of harsh, bitter laughter and scarcely recognized the sound as coming from her own lips. She had thought the past was gone, erased. And out of that dead past she was bringing living, vibrant life. Not ever could she walk free.

She forced herself to a calm surveyal of the present situation. Before, there had been thought of a child, and signs had proved false. That was why, in these past few months, she had given no value to symptoms. Now she remembered her dizziness, the time when Ian had come in and found her fainting, and she had not understood.

And the days went, bringing verification. No mistake this time. And she must wrench her life to a great readjustment.

Ian answered her letter. He must accept her will, he said, but hope still reigned in his heart. . . . Just now he was thinking of getting into the war. He would let her know.

In silence the days followed one after another. Thaisa's loom work was creating a demand. She had specialized on a certain kind of scarf, and orders for them began to come from San Francisco, from Texas and from the east. She knew that Ian had had a hand in these orders.

Days, she worked at her loom in deep concentration, intent on new designs, unusual color combinations. And Benjamin became her staunch henchman, her medium now between the world and her isolated abode. From Beasley he brought her needed staples, and also from that place the soft white muslin that at night she fashioned into her child's layette.

And the burden she carried grew and was strong, so that she spent many hours of fatigue; and going listlessly for her milk and butter, she soon found Mrs. Morrison's startled eyes fixed upon her.

And as winter progressed, a hard question grew in the woman's eyes. Thaisa told her that her husband was in France, in the war zone — as she was confident Peter was.

But Mrs. Morrison, Thaisa saw, preferred to draw her own conclusions, since these gave an interesting fillip to monotonous days. And the puritan in her knew the desire to lash out and hurt another woman who dared to flaunt all

the decencies by remaining alone under the circumstances, while claiming a husband in France!

Still, Thaisa must not grow angry nor turn away. For the time was approaching when she would need some woman's aid. But soon it became an ordeal both physical and spiritual to turn her steps toward the Morrison farm and face Mrs. Morrison's prying, curious eyes.

There came the time when she must take definite action. So once again she turned to old Benjamin, her friend. And one day he drove her in to Beasley where a country doctor had his sign.

In a dingy, small office, she was booked for a certain date and asked about a nurse and other necessities. 'A hospital in Portland?' he suggested, and Thaisa nodded, marking down the date given to her.

Later when her time was very near she went to Mrs. Morrison. She would need some one to help her for a period after her return from the hospital. But the woman shook her head. She would be very busy. . . . It was too far to walk between the two places. . . . Many excuses.

'So you will not help me?' Thaisa asked at length. She was cold and trembling now as she stood in Mrs. Morrison's immaculate kitchen facing the tall, gaunt woman.

'It would be against my principles.'

Thaisa did not answer that. It was growing late, and Benjamin, so kind, so strongly her friend, waited outside to take her home. A trying day. She made another attempt. 'Even though you censure me, refuse to believe the truth that I am a married woman, couldn't you put aside your prejudices for the sake of the child?'

‘No!’ Sudden anger came into the woman’s voice. ‘It isn’t fair that you should be favored with a child. All my life I’ve hungered for one, and I’ve walked straight in the fear of the Lord—yet have I been denied.’ And then as abruptly returning to her cold manner: ‘It wouldn’t be right; lessons should be taught.’

Thaisa turned and walked out into the road where old Benjamin waited, talking to Morrison, the farmer. Something in Thaisa’s face startled both men.

‘You’d better have Mis’ Morrison come along with us,’ old Benjamin cried.

‘She won’t come. . . .’ Thaisa spoke through drawn lips.

‘I’ll take you home,’ said old Benjamin, ‘and go on for the doctor.’

He realized that Thaisa could not now take the trip to Portland to the hospital. Very carefully, he drove back to the shack.

II

Two hours later, Thaisa, alone, wracked with pain, beheld from her window a strange sight. From afar down the road came Morrison, the farmer with the wide, determined face, the beard trimmed so square and broad. Before him, he drove his wife.

He held no whip, but the impression could not be missed that he did wield a long and snake-like instrument of torture that sent his victim before him. His granite face was set, the lips tightly held, the small eyes cold as glass.

The woman, reluctant, resentful, yet afraid to disobey,

went before him, at times writhing as though the whip flecked her shoulders.

The pair turned in at the gate — came down the path. Thaisa, her face blanched, opened the door to them.

‘Ma’am, Miss Worthington,’ Morrison began, ‘Ma’am, I’ve brought her to your help. It’s a woman’s bitter hour, and she’s never known it. Let her see now.’

He watched his wife, at his command, don an apron, go to the kitchen stove and commence to build a fire, all in bitter silence. Then he betook himself to the tree stump outside, alert to discover and overcome immediately any insubordination.

After a time, Thaisa, remembering the hand on her shoulder that early morning when Jenny so abruptly awoke her, said to Mrs. Morrison, who was now sitting black with anger near the blazing stove: ‘Could you help me a little?’

Compelled perhaps by the sheer agony in Thaisa’s eyes, the woman rose and lent her aid.

And so the journey began.

12

Through it all, Thaisa, a little light-headed, thought she was enacting the story of life and that through all the agony she must not falter. . . .

Even after the doctor finally arrived — and all the hours through the night till dawn, while the battle raged — the old farmer kept his place without, moving about at times, but always within range of the door.

. . . Till a small cry arose, and in time a portly figure ap-

peared at the door and Mrs. Morrison bore the trophy of a woman's victory. And she smiled with pride as she beckoned her husband, as though never had black anger and blacker censure filled her heart.

Thaisa, white and worn, as she lay in her bed, still wandering a little in her mind, thought that men and women sometimes had to be driven with whips to partake of a bountiful table.

13

Her son!

The thief of her dreams. He lay against her breast, tiny, healthy and seemingly content with his barren environment.

Thaisa was ill for nearly a month, listless, literally tired out. And Mrs. Morrison came every day, now undriven, eager to see and to hold the child.

Paying the doctor made heavy inroads into Thaisa's resources. Mrs. Morrison, her eyes fixed greedily upon the child, refused any recompense.

Her work in helping in the child's advent gave her, in her own mind, a kind of authority, so that when she visited she brought milk and other commodities and, though childless, thousands of words of advice on the boy's care and rearing.

Thaisa named the child Justin, a name she had always liked. And, back at her loom as soon as ever possible, she wove all day, with the clothes-basket crib close beside her.

The months passed. The boy was creeping about her feet, standing up, running away to be caught, and held till breathless against her heart.

And he grew to be the whole of life to her. Completely

hers, never to be shared. Peter, his father, she put away from her, even in this relationship. The child was hers, promising a beauty she had never before known. . . . Perfect.

. . . Wholly hers. Yet there were times when thoughts of whether Peter should be told of his son came to disquiet her. But as Justin grew more dependent in every way upon her, any claims that Peter might have, faded.

For Justin was a part of her. These processes that went on within her were scarcely conscious ones. The child was anodyne — healing and beautifying. And with the hourly deepening of the bond, the unshared possession became the automatic gesture of her life.

And in and by this possession she lived. For here there was no disillusion or struggle, save the fundamental one that had brought this joy into being. A simple paeon of mother and child, but raised above the commonplace by Thaisa's every thought of Justin as completely her own.

Day by day her happiness in this close companionship increased. She was his world, as he was hers. No other should ever intrude. She felt at last that she had come to her mountain top — that shining, clear space that had beckoned to her all her life.

Peter's share in this life held no integrity for her. She had been alone through the intense experience, and it seemed inevitable that she make Justin her orbit. Now, looking down the long years to his manhood, she still saw herself his star, his need and his chosen confidante.

She penetrated into his young soul in a way no mother whose life is divided might do. Secret joys she knew as she

held her child or guided his tiny footsteps. And as she worked long hours into the night — worked that he might be well nourished and clothed — she felt exultant. A conqueror who asked odds of none.

14

One day Benjamin brought her a letter from Ian. He had, he told her, really enlisted in the war, now that America was in. Within a few days, he would start across the water. There would be time to hear from her before he sailed if she wrote at once. ‘Thaisa, I love you,’ he ended. ‘I believe I shall come back, and that nothing shall keep us apart. Remember this: no force in your life or anything that might come to me shall be of power to separate us. I am yours as long as life shall last, and perhaps after what we know as life. . . .’

She sat for a long time with his letter in her hand, and again the thought of what might have been came upon her. And tears rose hot in her eyes.

15

The seasons passed. Work and harder work. Mrs. Morrison still walked over every day to see the small Justin Dagmar who, happy and friendly, held out his small hands at her approach, and laughed joyously as she picked him up and carried him about.

Justin had a lovely, deliberate way with him that even at an early age was fascinating. Thaisa saw more and more

that in him dwelt sincerity and a quiet power. He would stand before her with eagerness in his eyes, but he did not babble words — only that vocabulary of love in his expression. Once she caught him to her, a flood of the strongest emotion she had ever known touching her. ‘Justin — my little son!’ she cried.

‘You are a pretty mother,’ he said slowly and quaintly.

She looked down upon his head as he leaned against her knee. The light from the window struck in, and she saw, intensified, the slight difference she had before noticed in the color of his hair.

The silver wing! This had Peter bequeathed to his son.

With a cry she held the child closer to her breast. ‘But you are mine!’ she cried aloud. ‘My son! . . . The one treasure in the world that cannot be taken away.’

Justin, a little frightened, stared into her face. He did not cry easily, but a questioning look was in his eyes. She saw that her emotion disturbed him, and quietly she soothed him.

Day by day, the silver wing, lying among the dark locks so like her own, grew more noticeable. Sometimes a fear touched her. This external inheritance might go deeper into an adventurous spirit that would hurt both Justin and others.

But perhaps this mark might be of the spirit — a something to wing one far from the world and world thought that kept men slaves.

Oh, for something great within herself, a silver wing sparkling with crystal truths to grant her wisdom and courage to help this young life! After this prayer then, when-

ever noticing the white line in Justin's head, she felt in a deep, recessed part of her being a stirring, as though powers hitherto unused were being touched awake.

16

Day by day now, she found she must work harder to make sufficient money for their needs. She had mended their clothes till the original pattern was almost obliterated. When summer came again, she spaded up the entire ground about the shack. And with Justin at her heels interfering, laughing gaily, running away so that he must be caught and brought back, she planted her seeds.

In due time the vegetables came up. She found it possible to live on these, augmented by bread and milk and good butter from the Morrison place. Even Justin thrived on strained vegetable soup and milk.

Fall came and winter again; the seasons marched while Thaisa raised her child. Then the war was over, and the after-slump set in. People did not now order such luxuries as she wove at her loom, and there was Justin whose needs constantly increased.

She lay awake at night pondering on ways and means. It would be possible to go to Portland and make some kind of living; but to leave Justin alone all day was unthinkable.

But at least, she decided, she would make a trip to Portland and see what she could do. So one day in July, she walked over to the Morrison farm, pulling a small wagon on which Justin sat, gay in his own quiet way—a beautiful, four year old boy, very noticeable with the silver wing lying

among his dark tresses, his grey eyes scanning the lovely countryside.

Thaisa, looking back at him again and again, felt as always the high pride mount within her at his perfection, his difference. . . . Felt again the surge of intense motherhood that would hold him against every odd on earth.

Mrs. Morrison, sitting on her porch, rose at once and walked into the front yard when she saw Thaisa with Justin. Her eyes danced as she lifted the boy into her arms, and as she felt his lovely weight, a greedy look came into her face.

Thaisa stated her errand. Would Mrs. Morrison care for the child while Thaisa made a necessary trip to Portland? This was, she said, the first time she had found it necessary, since Justin's birth, to leave her home. But now she must do so, and it would be a very tiring trip for the boy.

Eagerly Mrs. Morrison proclaimed her willingness. 'I'm going with Benjamin,' Thaisa went on, 'and I'll be back before dark, I hope.'

'Stay as long as you wish,' Mrs. Morrison urged. 'I'll take good care of Justin.' She did not look at Thaisa as she spoke. Even now she held dark suspicions in her heart, but she was willing to endure any contact for the sake of the child who had come to fill a deep place in her hungry life.

In Portland, Thaisa walking down Alder Street, was deep in thought. She went first to the department stores, showing some of her finest work, hoping to receive orders. But again she found scant encouragement. Only on commission basis now could her handiwork be handled. She knew what of time lost this meant.

If she could find her own customers! So she set out. She

went, after a short ride, down St. John's Street, walked to several doors and rang door bells. Two doors were precipitously shut in her face. Crimson with humiliation, she stopped short in the street and thought of the inhumanity of woman to woman.

Memory of Justin came. No mortification must keep her from providing for him. Strengthened by this thought, she went on again, this time to back doors.

And as she went, she thought of Jenny, of how dramatically she had told her story in the Van Valkenberg mansion. Jenny, rough-shod, but never helpless.

She thought then how alike was human experience; yes, the common lot, pain and work. For a second, as she stood awaiting the opening of a door at which she had just rapped, she got a quickened sense of fellowship with all men, the one purpose of each part to perpetuate the whole, and in this illumination she lost sight of self.

Perhaps it was the uplifted look in her face that opened wide the door before which she stood. A sweet-faced woman looked at her wares and bought nearly all.

17

So her new way of selling opened. She found Mrs. Morrison eager to care for Justin the two days a week that she went to Portland.

But the work was difficult and often disheartening. Her feet ached and throbbed when the day ended and she sought the train for home. Her arms yearned for the touch of Justin. Each day that she was away from him seemed end-

less, and when at last, weary and travel stained, she reached the Morrison place, she would close her eyes to intensify the ecstasy the first sound of his young voice brought.

One June day, when she returned toward sundown, she felt, as soon as she entered the Morrison home that some change had come, or some conclusion perhaps been arrived at during her absence. Justin, as always, ran to meet her. The silver wing stood out clear upon his head, and suddenly for the first time in years, she remembered that meeting in the park in New York when Peter, sweeping his cap from his head, revealed this similar white line that gleamed in the sun.

But quickly she put the memory from her. All this was past and gone, not ever to be thought of again.

She caught Justin, flushed and lovely, to her and drank in his little words: 'Mother, where have you been? . . . Mother, I played ball today.' Over the dark head she caught a glimpse of a table set, contrary to the usual custom, in the dining room, and Mrs. Morrison beside it, smoothing a white cloth.

'Morrison's in the barn,' Mrs. Morrison commenced, coming into the kitchen where Thaisa stood. 'We want you should stay to supper, so we waited for you. . . . Did you notice the MacFarland farm is rented?'

No, Thaisa had not noticed. She had walked fast, this being a day when Benjamin could not bring her back the entire way. 'Yes,' Mrs. Morrison went on, 'to foreigners of a kind. They're smart enough, though, to work the hop yard, and they're going to sell to English buyers, now America has come to be too good to drink beer.'

Morrison came in. They entered the dining room, sat down to supper, Thaisa still puzzled by this hospitality.

‘Was Justin a bother?’ she began, her hand touching her boy’s as he sat beside her.

‘No, he’s never a bother.’

‘I didn’t run away, Mother,’ Justin volunteered.

‘I’m glad,’ Thaisa returned. She ate the delicious creamed potatoes, drank the inspiriting coffee, and waited for the something that was in the air to pyramid itself. And in time the farmer pushed back his chair, cleared his throat and began: ‘Mis’ Worthington, we’ve been talking about some things.’

Thaisa glanced from him to his wife. The woman’s eyes were alight, her heavy face strangely animated.

‘We want to adopt this boy and give him a proper name,’ the old farmer continued, and while Thaisa sat, tensely on guard, he hastened on: ‘My wife has always loved him, and I’ve been seeing of late what a great lad he is. And that snow-path in his hair, I’ve heard tell, brings luck.’

Thaisa turned to Justin, whose sleepy head was nodding against her shoulder. With a quick movement, she lifted him into her arms.

‘Don’t talk too hasty,’ Mrs. Morrison put in. ‘It’ll be for the boy’s good, and you’re having a hard time taking care of him.’

Thaisa did not speak. The two pair of eyes bored into her. She grew frightened. ‘We’ll give him a name, as we’ve said,’ Mrs. Morrison pursued.

‘He has a name of his own. I have told you before. My husband, the boy’s father, is in France.’

‘It doesn’t matter what you get up for self-protection,’ said Morrison. ‘We want the lad. The wife here — for all I drove her to his birth hour — wants him worse than anything she’s ever wanted. Isn’t that so, Bessie?’

‘Yes. . . .’

‘Well then, we’ll do our best by him, even to a fine education, Mis’ Worthington, and you can go free.’

Thaisa rose, holding the sleeping child against her heart. ‘There is no reason known to God or man why I should give up my boy,’ she said. ‘He is of honorable parentage and can hold his head up before the world.’

She walked around the table — half stumbling on a crocheted rug whose corner turned up — and went swiftly toward the door.

‘You’d better stay the night,’ said Mrs. Morrison, ‘and in the morning you’ll see clearer.’

Thaisa saw that her statements had made no effect upon these people.

‘No — no, thank you. . . .’ she murmured and went on with her burden into the kitchen, Mrs. Morrison close behind her. The woman put her hand out as though to bar the way, but Thaisa sprang past and out into the night.

Near the gate, she caught sight of Justin’s little wagon. Catching it by the handle, she dragged it after her.

Stumbling at times — for she was very weary — she went down the road, the child growing heavier against her breast, the wagon clanking at her heels.

Shadows seemed to leap out at her. And hands reached out to take her son. She held him tighter, going on down

the dark road, seeing ever the menace of those who would rob her of a beauty inexpressibly precious.

She reached the shack at last. Within, she put Justin down and lit a lamp.

Don waking, chirped and waited for her reply. But her stiff lips could utter no word. She undressed Justin and put him to bed. Then carefully, so he might not wake, she dragged two heavy chairs against the door and sat watching till dawn came, dark and wretched fears within her.

18

But the clear light of day brought the relief of common sense.

The Morrisons could not take Justin from her unless she wished to give him up. It lay within her hands to bestow or withhold this gift.

Still, there were new problems to be faced. No longer could she go to the Morrison farm for milk and eggs. And within walking distance, there lay no other farm.

Except the MacFarland place. Now she remembered there were new tenants there, and she wondered if they would be able and willing to supply any of her necessities.

Finding her courage then, with Justin in his little wagon she walked by the farm one day. The front yard as she passed was empty, but at the moment a woman emerged from the house and came to stand near the platform where once Jenny had stolen, jealously seeking Richard.

Thaisa stopped. In the distance she could see a finely kept cow browsing in a nearby field.

The woman approached the gate. She was a tall, pale woman with thin lips and cool, pale eyes. Her black hair was drawn tight back from a knobby and shiny forehead. 'Good afternoon,' Thaisa said, and the woman nodded.

'I should like to buy milk from you. Is that possible?' Thaisa went on.

'No,' the woman returned plainly, flatly. 'We're selling it in town.'

Whether or not this statement was true, Thaisa could not know. But some deep feeling within made her believe she was being boycotted.

The woman continued to stand there, staring. There was no malice in her face, only an animal curiosity as she stared from Justin to Thaisa. She had, then, been given a Morrison interpretation. Thaisa turned, walked back again. She would have Benjamin procure canned milk from Beasley for Justin.

Her future now looked dark and unpromising. But the child precluded any falling by the wayside.

New life, new forces within her, were springing to meet her needs.

As she went, a whirring noise attracted her attention. She paused, eyes raised to the sky.

Presently: 'Big bird, big Don,' Justin cried. And then a great plane flew over them in a wide circle, as though searching. Finally the machine settled in a clear field.

Though the sight of the plane was unusual, Thaisa went on, Justin chattering in his little wagon. But as she passed the acreage where the machine had landed, a man stepped

out, and, coming toward her, lightly vaulted an old barbed wire fence.

Something familiar in the figure as it advanced stopped Thaisa in her path. And then she cried out: 'Bertram!'

Bertram Lewis indeed — whom she had recognized despite the deep graven scar that extended across his face from eyes to chin. He came close, hands extended.

They stood, Thaisa still shaken, unable to believe that literally from a clear sky had come this reminder of a past now so dim, so far away. He had, she saw, deepened. Not merely a rich man's son now, able to indulge any vagrant fancy, but one aged somewhat and facing facts in a world not quite so gay and irresponsible.

'I came to see you,' he said, and with a glance at Justin: 'Your child, Thaisa? I had not heard.'

'Yes.'

'He is like you.' He put his hand out to the boy. Justin, at once friendly, laughed in his accustomed solemn manner, and Bertram smiled back.

'You live near here, Thaisa?'

'Yes. Shall we walk to my place?' She relinquished the wagon handle to Lewis and walked down the road with him, mystified.

Once within the shack she anchored Justin among his toys, made tea for Lewis, and awaited the explanation of this strange, fairylike visit.

He began at once: 'I was in the war, Thaisa, and when I came back I kept on flying. . . . My father still foots the bills.'

'What about the theatre, Bertram?'

He touched lightly the horrid scar that crossed his face. 'With this? . . . An honorable scar so termed, but not in any way to be concealed.'

He did not mean, she saw, to go into details, and she would not press him: 'I'm staying now at Vancouver and practicing round a Government Fort. I may yet go into the commercial end of aviation. . . . I flew in the war.'

She was silent, waiting. 'Thaisa,' he went on, 'I'm here because I met a friend of yours over there who wanted me to see you and give you a small gift.'

'Who was it?' Her hands were trembling.

'Ian Trevor. We were together a great deal. Miracle, we thought, that we both knew you.'

He went on: 'We used to talk, and when we discovered our mutual acquaintanceship with you, he asked me, in the event of anything happening to him to bring you this. . . .'

He went fumbling into his pocket—still not daring to meet her eyes—and produced a square envelope and a small package.

These he gave into her cold hand. The tissue-paper beneath the heavier paper was old, and very carefully she spread its fragile folds. Within lay a brooch of green gold set with small perfect pearls.

'The brooch belonged to Ian's mother, and Ian wanted you to have it—to wear it. . . .'

Seeing her emotion, he went on talking. '. . . Trevor did not, of course, know whether you would be here or not—but he drew a diagram of this place for me—and I believed I could find it easily. . . . It wasn't so easy after all. I came

out several times, cruising about, trying to get my bearings . . .’

. . . And on and on he talked, until she had mastered herself. Then: ‘I’m flying back to Vancouver,’ he said, ‘but I shall come again. There may be something I can do for you.’

She found her voice. ‘Is he — dead?’

He nodded. ‘He won a score of fights in the air — then one day the wing of his machine was hurt and — he came down. . . . All France thought him brave and splendid. . . .’

With a pitying glance, he left her. Don burst into song that swelled his tiny yellow throat. Thaisa did not look at the bird, nor when his tones died away, answer his demand for praise. . . .

She could hear the sound of the plane as it soared up. . . . Then, in time, silence.

19

She walked to the cage and said to Don, ‘He gave you to me.’ She remembered Ian’s words, ‘Captive, but a singer.’

After a time, she pinned the brooch to her dress. She touched it and seemed to invoke his presence. Once more, eager and glowing, he stood before her. ‘Ian,’ she whispered, ‘Ian. . . .’

Hard, bitter tears she shed then for her lover. Bitter tears for what might have been. But as the days went, she girded herself. Her child needed her strength and her laughter. Press down, then, the sorrow and the pain, and go on.

Lewis came many times in his big plane that darkened the sky. He was anxious that she go up with him, but flying was not to be thought of for the child. Too hard on a small heart — so Lewis thought.

But on one visit he brought a young man with him, and while this alert youngster 'Billy' remained to care for Justin, Thaisa went for a short flight. . . . Fear, at first, but soon exhilaration awakening many strange and deep thoughts.

The earth below, how small the earth! Man, building, dominating this bird marvel, but himself so confused.

But she grew calmer, less intense. Values changed. Even Justin, for whom she would easily yield her life if need called — even Justin seemed less important now. More himself, an honored guest within her gates. . . . And she remembered the youth in the tapestry, whose power, she was wont to think, came from his indifference. But was it not his consciousness that he must journey the way alone — that he could never know another, for he himself would forever remain a stranger?

. . . Down on the earth again, but her contemplations had left something. The valley, as she trod it, seemed remote, while looking up, reality began.

Several times, seeing how she loved to fly, Lewis brought Billy to care for Justin, while Thaisa went up in the ship. He helped also in a practical way, by carrying her loom work to the stores in Vancouver, thus opening newer markets for her. And he asked her no questions, though he knew she had left Peter.

Justin, too, greatly admired the big bird. He would stand

entranced while it rose, circled, returned to the ground. 'Justin's a fine, outstanding little chap,' Lewis remarked one day, as he and Thaisa sat outside on the steps of the shack and Justin played about them. 'He is like Dagmar—I can see that—he talks like him in that slow way. . . .'

He gazed off into the distance: 'I saw a bit of Dagmar in Chicago. I missed him in France. Correspondent, I suppose you know, for Foster's Weekly, which has grown to be a notable paper. . . . He did some fine work. Afterwards, he got in the fighting end. Now he's in New York, though not doing much, I hear. He has days on end of black depression. Work in the war did his nerves no good.'

He went on when she did not answer.

'Strangeley read one of Dagmar's plays; he feels he can do something very worth while if he'll work. Strangeley's a well-known manager now, and he speaks often of you. He says when you come back—as he's always sure you will—he'll make you great, with what you have to give. He has all the patience to wait for you, and unbounding faith. You will go back some day, Thaisa?'

'I don't know; I never make plans.'

'About Dagmar,' he continued. 'Strange, with a son like that, he doesn't buckle down to life, even if you and he didn't hit it off.'

She spoke very quietly: 'He knows nothing of Justin.'

In amazement: 'He doesn't know?'

'No. I don't wish him to know. I can take care of my child.'

'But is that all, the ability to take care of the boy? Is that all? And Dagmar himself?' He stopped short. 'You

know best, of course. You know where relationships have failed you. . . . But does man ever reach his dreams? '

She felt his battle and said: 'I hope you'll be happy, Bertram.'

'I shall be in my own way. . . . You know I am a Jew, and there is work for us. My people swarm — a problem in themselves. American Jewish life is so rich, so complicated, thick full of viciousness and nobility, shot through with the majestic tragedy of an old race panting for life. I want to help. . . .' There was a burning in his eyes.

After a time: 'Well, we're borne afar. I go to France and return with this . . .' Lightly he touched the horrible scar. ' . . . and still go on — diverged of course — but I go on. And Reba, the woman I'd give my soul for, sees only Strangeley, who is quite blind to her beauty. And you. . . . Here you are in a little God-forsaken shack, raising your child alone. . . . But Thaisa, don't think you've lost contact with a world that will some day acclaim you. Remember that once I prophesied to your father about your future, when you'd penetrated experience for yourself. . . . You've touched life at first hand, and the future is yet to be.'

He rose. 'Is there anything I can do for you? I shall be able to come out again perhaps once more.'

'Yes;' she replied. 'If you'd go into Portland to the City Hall and get me a copy of the certificate registering Justin's birth — with the names of his parents. . . .'

His face saddened. 'What are they trying to do to you, Thaisa?'

'They can do nothing to me,' she said, 'but they musn't hurt Justin. Will you bring me the paper?'



He nodded, and with a parting word was gone.

He did not come again. He wrote, enclosing a copy of the certificate and saying that he had been called back to Chicago.

20

After Justin was asleep, Thaisa sat out on the steps, looking into a brilliant moonlit night — pondering.

The night with its radiance brought the thought of Ian very close. His influence seemed upon her and she stood up, reached out her hands — her characteristic attitude when deeply moved — and cried aloud into the silver mystery: ‘Ian. . . . Ian!’ and in the peace that stole upon her, she refused to believe in death.

21

Attracted by some unusual sound, she turned and saw that a group of people were coming down the road. Strange! Her heart commenced to beat in agitated rhythm.

A small company came on, stopped before her gate, entered into the front yard and halted to face her as she stood — eyes wide and black, all color gone from her lips.

Quite still she stood, pale of face, but erect with courage.

She saw Morrison, and his wife, the woman living on the MacFarland farm and two others — men.

‘What do you want?’ she asked, for there was menace in these faces.

Morrison stepped nearer. As he stood gazing at her, he struck a deep memory. The man Kraus! The same ex-

pression, avaricious for something that should be sacred — kept from marauding hands. It was Kraus; she felt a hot, covetous touch. Then her eyes and mind cleared. . . . Simply Morrison, the Scotch farmer.

But he was coveting a treasure. And her mind leaped out for some help in this hour. Richard perhaps, coming with a protection to hold above her — coming in the rain. Her father — some one to put out a hand. Suddenly she felt pitifully alone and weak.

Then, even before Morrison spoke, courage returned to her. . . .

‘We’ve come,’ said Morrison, ‘to ask once more for the child. We’ll adopt him legally, as we’ve told you.’

‘I do not want to give my child away. There is no reason why I should. I can care for him in every way necessary.’

‘He’ll have a fine name.’

‘He has a fine name of his own. And I have a certificate testifying to the legality of his birth.’

‘Whose certificate?’

‘Dr. Simmons’.

‘He put down what you told him, that’s all.’

‘It can all be verified.’

Mrs. Morrison moved nearer. ‘It isn’t only whether the child is legitimate,’ she said, ‘but that you’re not fit to raise him. We know of your doings, up in an airship with a man, and you a lone woman without a husband.’

‘No, you’re not the right kind to rear a little fellow,’ the woman with the curious eyes put in.

Thaisa’s head went up proudly: ‘Is that all you have to say?’

‘No,’ Morrison spoke again. ‘Give the boy to us to be raised honorably, so he can look every man in the face, or — we’re a committee here — we’ll go to court and swear all we know about you.’

‘And more! . . .’ A smile touched Thaisa’s lips, and seeing this, one of the men said: ‘Look how brazen she is! Why not just take the child, Morrison? We’d be doing the right thing. Any judge would uphold you.’

Morrison’s expression betrayed that he was not so sure of this. But his wife, close at his elbow, leaned eagerly forward.

Again fear sprang into Thaisa’s heart. Desire and hatred were abroad here. And how speciously they could explain their vandal act! . . . To enter now and seize Justin, even to hold him for a few days, until, in some manner through law and cupidity, the child should be given permanently into their care. This way, she saw, they were prepared to take.

Swiftly she turned and went into the shack. With hands whose trembling she could scarcely control, she shut the door, shoved a chair against it, and turned in search of the gun that still stood in its corner.

She lifted the gun and, going to the window open to the night air, she projected her head: ‘I have a gun here,’ she cried, and raised the rusty length to support her words. ‘Loaded. . . . I’ll shoot anyone who comes near my home.’

‘You know what that unlawful act would mean!’ Morrison shouted.

‘As lawful as your intentions! You have invaded my home, and I’ll protect my own.’

Her hands ceased their trembling, and strength poured into her.

They stood, the men and the women talking among themselves, occasionally glancing toward the figure in the window. And all the time Thaisa never wavered, never moved from her intent to keep within her domain the child who lay in his bed, sleeping peacefully through all the drama.

Once Morrison ventured near the window. Thaisa steadied the gun against her shoulder, took aim, and cried out, 'Not another step, Mr. Morrison. This is my home.'

He stepped back quickly, but still to Thaisa's eyes he was a sinister figure. His spade-like beard seemed to move, to threaten. But she kept her finger firmly against the gun. Her throat was dry and her lips parched as from fever, but she felt herself strong, while they outside were afraid and weak.

She was racial now, utterly primitive, fighting for what belonged to her. Would she pull the trigger of this rusty old gun if one of these men should come forward?

Without a doubt, she knew she would.

For an hour she sat; then Morrison once more approached. But from a distance, he shouted: 'We'll have the law on you, Mis' Worthington. We'll see whether you can keep an innocent child to corrupt by your ways.'

To this threat she returned no reply. In the moonlight her face was sharp cut, lifted high, and the light in her eyes unwavering.

She saw them turn and leave reluctantly. And all was silent.

She did not close the window; she merely relinquished the

gun for a second, then picking it up again, she took aim steadily at the tree stump and fired.

There was a flash—a powder smell. A smile touched her lips. She had not been sure that the gun was loaded, but who—knowing Richard—would believe he would take precautions to empty the chambers? Still, she had not been sure.

She turned to regard Justin. The reverberation had not disturbed him. Unconscious and beautiful childhood. She could see the silver wing glistening in a shaft of moonlight that came through the window.

A small noise disturbed her. But it was only Don stirring in his cage. The thought came that perhaps Morrison and his crew might return, hoping to take her unarmed.

She knew now that they would not hesitate at anything. Passion had made them lawless though they prated of justice. . . .

She resumed her place at the window, her hand upon the gun. The night wore on, grew black and she could see dancing shadows about—catch eerie sounds.

She turned again to regard the sleeping child and a great sense of possession flooded her. *Now he was completely her own.*

Dawn came. The little bird began to sing. Justin stirred. He was always an early waker. She closed the window and leaned the gun against the sill. Then she lifted Justin and dressed him. This morning there was deeper joy in her

ministrations. It was an instinctive act, and the first time that as she combed the waving hair she sought to hide the silver wing beneath a thick, dark strand.

Later, she prepared their morning meal and with her new courage strong upon her, she flung the door open to the sunshine. She stood peering into her world, and saw the slow years going on, while the life beside her grew and blossomed. To this service, she would dedicate all, and draw her sustenance from the need and the returning love of her child.

After her small household duties were finished, she took out her silks and her dyes and set to work at her kitchen stove. In time, the pale, raw strands came out purple, wine-red, gold and peacock-blue.

Justin, running about happily, came to lean against her. She turned, lifted him hungrily and pressed him to her.

Surprised at her vehemence he searched her face, then threw his small arms about her neck murmuring little words. The impulsive action gave her exquisite joy. Knowing him to be her whole destiny, his love for her, undivided and clear, seemed the perfect crown.

At noon, old Benjamin stopped before her gate. He was upset, she saw at once as she met him at the door. He spoke quickly: 'Oh, Mis' Thaisa they're all up against you!'

'I know, Benjamin. They came here last night with threats.'

'Yes; and they're going over to the county seat near Beasley today to see Judge Caper. He's a hard one, and they're a vengeful lot.'

'Don't worry, Benjamin.'

‘ But this judge, Mis’ Thaisa, he’s thin lipped and cruel, and he wants to keep in with the farmers about. . . .’ Old Benjamin went away, shaking his head, greatly disturbed.

For a moment she stood watching Justin at play with his engine and blocks. Then with light, firm step she moved to the small table near the window and sat down. From a tin box in the drawer, she took out the certificate and made a clear copy, leaving it on the table ready for any use.

At noon she heard an automobile horn sounding in the distance. Seizing the paper, and with a word to Justin to remain indoors, she ran down the path, stood in the road and waited till the oncoming car was almost upon her.

The driver, of necessity, stopped. It was Morrison, with his wife, and in the seat behind were a man and woman — two of those who had surrounded her home the night before.

‘ Well? . . .’ Morrison began curtly.

Thaisa handed him the paper. Her voice was steady. ‘ Here is a copy of the certificate I spoke about. You can look up the facts.’

‘ Very well, we will. Where’s the boy’s father? ’

‘ This address will follow him.’ She gave the old Chicago number, and Morrison — his eyes disbelieving — copied down what she told him.

He threw at her then: ‘ Even if it’s proved he’s legal-born, we think we can do better by him than you can. And his father won’t raise no fuss. Why, he hasn’t been to see the child since he was born; we’ve made sure of that.’

‘ You can never take my son from me,’ said Thaisa steadily. ‘ Never.’

They drove away with no further words.

Thaisa disdained to retreat in any way. She took Justin for walks down the road and through the woods. Sometimes, as twilight came on, she would go with him into the little garden she had spaded, and to his great delight play hide-and-seek with him, or holding his small hands dance lightly and gracefully round the mulberry tree.

There were, of course, the serious moments. She took stock of herself. She was thirty and filled with a purpose more definite than she had ever known. But there was the problem of the boy's future—his education—to be faced.

But for this summer she would put heavy thoughts away. . . . Old Benjamin, staunch and always ready to help, brought her supplies from Beasley and took her loom work to mail from that point. The Morrisons and their threats Thaisa refused to think about.

It came about then, that one day, later in the summer, when she was playing with Justin in the small garden, she glanced down the road and saw a figure approaching.

At once, despite the slight limp, she knew. . . . Peter!

She stopped, stood perfectly still, and in that second of waiting, a hundred surmises went through her mind.

Peter knew then. The legal machinery had searched him out for confirmation of what the birth certificate contained. Yes, he had been sent for, and now he was here.

Wildly, she looked about. Then, with an ungovernable instinct to hide Justin, she ran to the boy, seized him in her arms and entered the shack, knowing that Peter could not

see this drama for the trees that hid his vision. Closing the door, she half fell against it, while she fought to recover her breath.

She heard Peter open the gate, come slowly down the path, and still she remained, Justin clinging to her skirts, frightened and bewildered.

But, as Peter's knock came, she found her senses and her poise. There need be little exchange between them. . . . Simply to verify the facts she had given Morrison, and then he could depart. 'Go to Mother's room,' she told Justin, 'and build her a great house with a tall steeple.'

He fell in with her plans. 'All right,' he answered. She shut him in, holding the door handle tight, concentrated in the one will to keep him there, to keep him for her own.

Then she flung the outer door open and stood facing Peter. Seconds passed without words as they gazed at one another. In his face lay a question. Was this woman Thaisa? This slender, worn creature with the gallant, uplifted head!

And she looked at a man, familiar to her and yet greatly changed. . . . A steadiness never before noted, though when he spoke his voice trembled. His eyes she saw too were filled with a loneliness and hunger, which at once she interpreted as desire for the child of whose existence he had just learned. She said at length, 'Come in,' and he stepped into the known room. For a moment, memory made him breathless.

Then he began, as though explanation were due her for an intrusion: 'I was moved by an irresistible impulse to come.'

‘You received no word, no letter, then?’ she cried.

‘No — nothing.’

Relief filled her. His visit at this time then was a coincidence. He had not received the certificate. Morrison had disdained the proof. Peter did not know. And all the moments before inevitably he must learn of his child were golden and precious to her.

‘But how did you know I was here?’ she asked at length.

‘Thaisa, when I received your letter saying you were going away, I gave you your solitude as a gift. . . .’

‘A gift?’

‘Because I so longed for you. My every impulse was to fly to you.’

‘But you did not know my hiding place?’

‘It seemed only plausible that you should come here; there was no other place where you could so hide yourself away. And I verified that. . . .’ Then, after a pause, ‘Often at night I have lain awake, trying to realize the hurt I did to your life. I remembered the picture of a boy and girl playing out there in the road. I was sure that you loved that boy, that he loved you, and that I should have gone away.’

She said suddenly, ‘Peter, you’re very tired. Sit down.’

He took a chair near her loom, and she came to stand beside him, tall and very slender. He reached up, took her hands, released them. After a moment she sank down on a stool close by. ‘I told your father I was coming here, Thaisa. He has just returned from England and was greatly disturbed when Jenny told him that she had never heard from you.’

‘England?’

‘Yes. He tried to get into the war; but he was too old to fight — or they thought he was. I always just missed him, though we went over together.’

‘I heard that you were in France. Were you injured?’

‘I managed to get to the front; I was slightly hurt.’ She remembered his limp. He leaned forward earnestly. ‘Thaisa,’ he asked, ‘will you tell me why you went away so abruptly? . . . I thought we had come to some newer understanding at the time I left for New York.’

‘My mother told me of her letter to you asking that you send for me,’ she told him directly. ‘I could not stand your — generosity.’

‘Generosity! . . . You knew better, Thaisa. It was something deeper striking into you. When you learned of Jenny’s letter, the thought that you had been turned aside from the greater thing was tragedy for you.’

Deep pain was in his eyes, and for a moment she closed her own.

‘You never told me of the letter,’ she said, ‘but I saw the whole situation. You had escaped; your freedom was precious; you were beginning to forget; and then this call to your chivalry. . . .’ Even now the blood came smarting into her face. ‘Oh, it was all so bitterly wrong, so cruel. No wonder you were so filled with dissatisfaction after our marriage.’

‘You do not know the reason for that. . . . I know now that I loved you completely, but always there was the persistent voice telling me that you were not mine — never really mine, Thaisa.’

‘Oh, to what stupid lengths my childish faith in a fated love led us both!’

‘No. I will not have you say or believe that, Thaisa. . . .’

They sat without speaking; then Thaisa, changing the current, asked, ‘You are settled in New York?’

She meant now, he saw, to talk only of commonplaces. ‘Yes. Is there anything I can do for you, Thaisa?’ And gazing around the room, ‘Thaisa, are you going to stay on here? If you would come back and let me show you. . . .’

But at the look in her eyes he broke off.

‘I want you to feel you are quite unburdened,’ she said, ‘and free to go on with life in your own way.’

A little sound was heard, and Justin came from the other room. . . . ‘Mother,’ he cried. ‘Mother, it’s all done!’ And he stood blinking at the stranger.

Peter, who had slackened in his chair, a blank and hopeless look upon his face, lifted himself. ‘*Mother!*’ Justin repeated and ran to her, in his shy way burying his face in her lap.

The color rushed to Thaisa’s brow. Her hand went stroking the child’s dark hair. But she was conscious of the life that raised itself in Peter. Quiveringly she realized that he had risen, that he stood over her, and that his voice choked on her name.

She lifted the child’s face and turned it toward him: ‘This is your son.’

The world about him seemed to revolve and for a space everything grew black.

‘He is named Justin. . . . Justin Dagmar.’

Peter, still reeling, gazing with unbelief, submerged in an emotion that sent the blood in rapid flow to his eyes, could not speak. Then, his vision clearing, he fixed his gaze on the upturned face of the boy, who stood looking with curiosity at the man who had brought such disturbance.

Thaisa ruffled the waving hair. And Peter saw, lying along one side, the silver wing.

The look in his eyes, as he gazed at Justin, revealed an almost frightening depth of feeling — something living coming up through layers of dark despondency.

‘He was born here?’ he asked. ‘And you were alone?’

She nodded. ‘He was born here. . . .’ Into her face came a deep look. He felt all she might have revealed but did not. He felt her hungers, her struggles, her rebellions and her adjustments.

‘Here!’ he said again. Ugliness and privation and stark loneliness!

Justin whispered, ‘Who is the man, Mother?’

And she answered after a pause: ‘This is your father, Justin.’

‘Fa — ther. . . .’ He repeated the strange word. ‘Fa — ther. . . .’

In a moment Peter was on his knees, his face buried in his hands. Thaisa cried, ‘Peter, don’t!’ But the tears fell from between his fingers. The child, disturbed, moved away and returned to his blocks. . . . At last Thaisa dropped beside Peter and put her arm about his shoulders. ‘Don’t, Peter!’ she cried again.

‘How can you ask me to be calm? Am I not cast to the

ground at what you have done for me? My son! And you bore him alone, in want — I know — I feel — no friendly hand to aid. Because your life once was tied up to mine — your gorgeous, vivid life dragged down to the instability of mine.'

'Peter. . . . Peter. . . .'

'No, there is nothing to say. Despite all the wonder of what you have shown me, I wish I had not come. This is pain beyond a man's strength to bear.'

'Peter, you have been ill. How could you come out of that dreadful time with steady nerves?'

'You are sorry for me, I know — you little child of the park. . . . Always you have uplifted and damned people with your vision. . . . "*Are you Jesus come again?*" she asked me. And I was a burden to her — a thorn to prick and goad. . . . And then I abandoned her!'

'You did not abandon me, Peter. . . . Peter, there is no blame. . . . And I am so happy in Justin. I ask only to be left alone with him.'

'Yes, you shall be left alone.' He lifted a face, stained with tears, distorted by his self-flagellation and passion. 'For see what has happened. Long ago you lost faith in a love ordained, and — after you had gone — there came to me that same faith in a love meant. . . . Yes, through some alchemy the faith came to me.'

But though her heart was touched, this gave her no joy. 'There is just my child now,' she whispered.

Suddenly the edifice Justin had erected tumbled, and the boy cried out in dismay.

'Help him, Peter,' said Thaisa, and they rose together.

He walked to Justin. 'The steeple fell,' the lad mourned. Peter hesitated, then bent down. 'Do you think you can build it again?' Justin asked.

'I can try,' said Peter.

Thaisa, watching, saw a new expression come up into Peter's face like a wave of light. She saw the two heads, so alike, as they stayed close together, intent on the building, and a fierce wave of jealousy clutched her. Her knees shook with the effort to obey her will to rush across the room and take Justin from the man who had equal share in him. She had said, 'Help him, Peter,' but she had not dreamed the effect upon her seeing them thus—the boy Peter, Peter the boy. . . . Seeing that her fundamental service to the child could not change the inexorable truth of their relationship, father and son.

So she stood, trembling in the clasp of the wildest passion she had ever felt.

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After a time, her pulses stopped their hard throbbing. But she still knew that to hold her own was her one desire. And when, like the prick of a sword, the thought of her inheritance intruded—Grandmother and Jenny refusing to meet life except on their own terms—she turned from the warning.

For here was mere justice. Out of all her pain she had come up steadily against her need—the need to hold this life, the one beauty that would never fail her.

She had fought for her child with a gun at her side; she could hold him with the weapon of her strong desire. She

could let Peter feel the strength of this resolve, and he would go.

As she gazed upon the two in their corner, the color rose high again in her face. For was that not lust in Peter's eyes as he looked upon this undreamed-of son. She remembered back in the early studio days how he had thrilled at the thought of a child. . . .

The mist cleared. She knew it was not lust in his face but a joy, a wonderment, as he looked at his child.

But he must go; despite the tie between them, he must go.

True, when he had fallen on his knees, torn by emotions he could not control, her sympathy had come pouring out. For any human being she would have felt that sympathy — any human being so bowed, so intensely filled with pain and remorse.

But that weakness was over. She had fought through until she had to come to this place, this power to hold her own. Career, fame — all that in her deepest soul she knew might be hers — in this moment was like an ounce of sand that pursed lips might blow away as of no consequence, no meaning. . . . Only to hold to her own.

Then, as though impelled, she turned and went to her loom and sat before it, her hands clasped. And as she sat, from out the past came once more the memory of the old tapestry and the youth with the outstretched hands. Clearly his face returned to her, uplifted, with the strong, beautiful look. She had struggled to an interpretation of that look.

A holy indifference! What she had meant was an emergence, a coming of age in life. . . . A coming of age. . . .

Peter approached, watch in hand. He must be on his way. As he neared Thaisa, he gazed at her closely. In her face there lay a nobility that he had not earlier marked, a courage unconquerable. And a serenity that yet made him more aware of the real woman. As she sat there before her loom, enriched it seemed by some understanding, he yet made a prayer: 'O God, let me open wide doors for her. . . .'

She turned and spoke. 'Stay here, Peter, with us — with Justin and me.'

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